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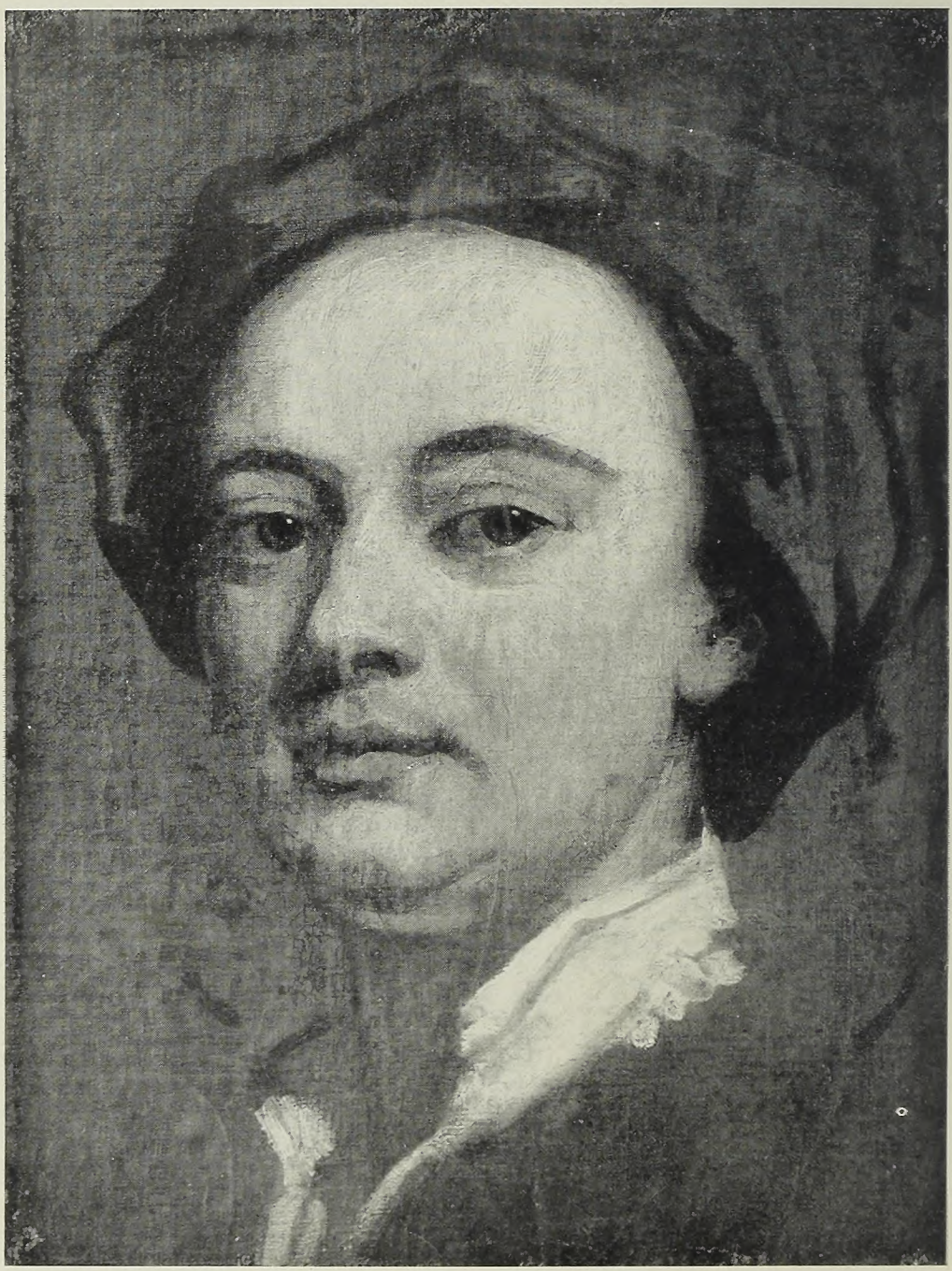
JOHN GAY

FAVORITE OF THE WITS



An unfinished sketch in oils, believed to be by Kneller, of John Gay.
Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery

JOHN GAY

FAVORITE OF THE WITS

By WILLIAM HENRY IRVING

DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA

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To

MY FATHER AND MOTHER

With Affectionate Gratitude

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PREFATORY NOTE

THE AUGUSTANS are again in fashion, but so far no adequate life of John Gay has appeared. His nineteenth-century reputation as an elegant trifler still holds its own in the casual writings about him, though a fair number of scholars, like Mr. Schultz and Mr. Sherburn, have studied particular aspects of his work. This book attempts to review as carefully as possible the facts of Gay's life and to study his works in relation to his experience and with reference always to the literary fashions of his day. The collections of letters, the periodicals, the theatrical records, the pamphlet literature, the early biographies, and all kinds of miscellaneous references to the poet have been used, as the reader will see from the notes. To the custodians of this material I wish to express my thanks for their courteous help. Particularly useful to me have been the books and other material relating to Gay gathered together by Mr. Ernest Gay of Boston and after his death presented to the Harvard Library by his nephew. More than I can express I am indebted to him and to his like elsewhere, that invisible company of collectors and scholars on whose work I lean.

The friends who have read my manuscript and helped me with their interest and criticism will find it easy to forgive me if I do not list their names here. They have had and have my warmest thanks. I mention Mr. Sherburn particularly, since he has not only helped me with criticism but generously turned over to me two unpublished Gay letters which I use with the kind permission of Mr. T. Cottrell Dormer, their owner.

Much of my research in preparation for writing this book was done while in England some years ago on sabbatical leave from my duties at Northwestern University. The Council on Research at Duke University has more recently aided me with grants and has finally made publication possible by a special subsidy. To the authorities of both these universities I wish to express my gratitude.

WILLIAM HENRY IRVING

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JOHN GAY

FAVORITE OF THE WITS

CHAPTER I

EARLY LIFE IN BARNSTAPLE AND LONDON

I

It would be difficult, I think, to find among the Augustan group of writers one whose contacts with the world of letters and of affairs were more varied and more extensive than John Gay's. He knew the shopkeepers and the politicians, the Whigs and Tories, Grub Street and St. James's, the ballad singers and the maids of honor. He was a genius, at least in the art of making friends. Like Horace he was never quite able to take seriously the things about which many of his friends grew unnecessarily excited. He could not take the world of affairs so seriously as Swift, nor the world of art so seriously as Pope. He loved the town and the country (the town somewhat more), the prince and the pauper (the prince somewhat more), and refused to disturb the balanced symmetries of life by unnecessary emphasis on particulars. He was no enthusiast.

Moreover, Gay's literary work has a representative quality about it which is missing in that of most of his contemporaries. He played the game well and usually pitched rather than caught the ball. He wrote practically everything that anyone wrote in his time, and his pre-eminence in two or three of the forms remains unquestioned after two hundred years. The thieves and whores of Newgate still live in his opera, and their round reality makes the Gilbert and Sullivan puppets look pallid. No one has written a genuine English pastoral except Gay and Spenser. Gay's delicately modeled songs strike us as surprising, for we have been so often told that the age of Pope was songless. These things we all know about him, but few of us have examined his work in detail and discovered how point for point he epitomizes the art of poetry as men practiced it in his time. He was literally and metaphorically secretary to the great

Scriblerus, a title which would suit his inbred modesty and which may suggest our approach in this study.

His life and work, then, we shall review, hoping that through him we shall the better understand his age. His large discursiveness, his spirit of experimentation, will certainly help us if we want to tour the Augustan Parnassus ourselves, that somewhat restricted "modern" Parnassus which as we look back upon it after two hundred years seems in its more conspicuous excrescences oddly jerry-built, solid though the foundations still remain.

From the biographer's point of view John Gay was most disobliging. He kept no diary, he wrote no autobiography, he neither preserved nor revised his letters. He was utterly careless about signing his name to poems and essays. He endured like the rest of his friends that last terror of death, a life from Curll's busy press, but even in 1733 nobody seemed quite sure where he was born or when, though Queensberry took generous care to let the world know where he was buried. Actually most people, except Curll, knew much about Gay at that time, but for some reason or another failed to put it down. Richard Savage made some tentative gestures towards a biography in 1736, from which nothing very elaborate developed.[1] Budgell and Aaron Hill—once such close friends of Gay—no longer cared, and Pope was too distinguished to dip his spoon into such small honeypots of literature.

This lack of dependable records is particularly annoying for the early years. After 1713, in which year Gay dedicated *Rural Sports* to his friend Alexander Pope, one finds plentiful materials, for though proximity to Pope might endanger a man's reputation it at least insured honorable or dishonorable mention. There are some few solid facts about Gay's life before this date as we shall see, and with them a mass of antiquarian detail about birthplace and family, about early associations in

[1] See *A General Dictionary, Historical and Critical: in which A New and Accurate Translation of that of the Celebrated Mr. Bayle . . . is included; . . .* By the Reverend Mr. John Peter Bernard; The Reverend Mr. Thomas Birch, M.A. and F.R.S. Mr. John Lockman; And other Hands (London, 1737), V, 406. Except as noted books mentioned in following footnotes were published in London.

Barnstaple and London, only part of which is of genuine significance in any attempt to explain the man and his work. Miscellaneous information about the poet's relatives and about life in Barnstaple in the late seventeenth century is of little interest unless we can show just how that kind of background conditioned Gay's character and affected his literary accomplishment.

It is sufficiently obvious, for example, from what we know of the man later that he found himself by nature comfortable in aristocratic company; he could live and die in the arms of Debrett and never lose that unaffected simplicity of nature which Pope and the rest of his friends so much admired in him. If we can show, then, that Gay's forebears had for generations been county people of some consequence, that the poet was to the manner born, that he was in this minor matter no Stephen Duck or Robert Burns, we shall have taken one small step on that difficult road towards understanding.

Again, if we can find in the family records evidence of business acumen or speculative fever, if we can find a strain of Puritan morality or religious enthusiasm against which the poet will presently react with unnecessary emphasis, we may be able more intelligently to untangle those interlaced strands of personality which at first glance look so complex. If this family should show sharply diverging principles in religion and politics, in the midst of which an orphaned youngster like the poet might easily develop a genial disregard for extreme views of any sort and perhaps presently a habit of tempered compromise in his thinking, then research even genealogical may find itself justified.

After all, though we may be but half-believers in that casual creed of the sensitive morality, surely it is of importance to know something of the town through the streets of which the poet wandered as a boy, something of the school to which he went and the exercises he did there, the friends he made, and the plans that were made for him. The greatest danger is that the shadows of multifarious detail may descend upon us and cloud the air so thickly that the figure of the boy, which should be everlastingly bright and central in the picture, may grow

dim or disappear entirely amid lists of names and figures, records of deeds, births, marriages, and deaths, and all the rest of the paraphernalia of antiquarianism.

The first fact to be noted about the poet's early surroundings is that his family was of established gentility, had been so since the early twelfth century and was to remain so until 1823, when Frithelstock Priory, near Barnstaple, north Devon, which had been the family seat since 1602,[2] was sold by the widow of the last male heir.[3] The poet's great grandfather, Anthony Gay,[4] had bought the place originally, and he it was who laid a foundation for the fortunes of the Gay family in the seventeenth century by marrying Elizabeth Beaple, daughter of the richest man in town, and adding some of her property, including the house in Joy Street in which the poet was born, to his own already large stock on hand. So Anthony and his sons' sons lived on in Barnstaple and the neighborhood. Some of them must have been poor, for there were very few Beaple heiresses to replenish the money boxes, and the Gays were great multipliers; but they seem to have been uniformly respectable and respected, for the pages of the parish records and local histories are sprinkled with the name, and almost invariably one finds them honorable enough to be styled "Mr.," "Esquire," "gentill man," in a time when those titles meant something more than empty compliment. Moreover, it was not only on the Gay side that the poet's family were honorable. His mother was a Hanmer and could boast connection with the family of that name in Hanmer, County Flint, and with Lord Hanmer of Bettisfield. Sir Thomas Hanmer, the Speaker of the House and editor of

[2] Daniel Lysons, *Magna Britannia* (1822), Vol. VI, part 2, pp. 242-243, 384. "Parkham: The manor of Goldsworthy, which had been for many descents the property and residence of the family of Gay, was conveyed by them to the Coffins before Risdon wrote his survey, and is now the property of Richard Pine Coffin, Esq." Tristram Risdon died in 1640. His book, *A Chorographical Description, or, Survey of the County of Devon*, brought down to 1630, was first published in two small 8vo. volumes in 1714. Lysons knew the proper date of Gay's birth. John Tuckett *(Devonshire Pedigrees*, 1859) says the family shifted to Frithelstock about 1599.

[3] The widow of the Reverend James Gay died in Frithelstock Priory on Aug. 8, 1823.

[4] Anthony Gay was Mayor of Barnstaple in 1638.

Shakespeare, was a kinsman. Thus there was a coat of arms on each side of the house, and John Gay, younger son of a younger son though he was, could take his family connections for granted. Some of his relatives had dabbled in trade; some were nothing but poor parsons; some were soldiers; but they all possessed a central family tradition, and that assurance of gentility which Pope, for instance, so notably lacked was theirs from the beginning.

How much money the poet's immediate family had to support such pretensions and give their sons a start in the world it is not now easy to say. The poet was born, June 30, 1685, in a large house on the corner of Joy Street and the High. His father had to pay a church-rate of £10·13*s.* 5¼*d.*, the highest on the street and one of the highest in the town. Even Castle House at the same time paid but £5 6*s.* 2¾*d.* Here the children romped happily about—John playing with young Phineas Pet, the shipbuilder's boy, and cutting initials in the church pews[5] when he ought to have been saying his prayers—until 1694, when calamity burst upon them in the death of their mother[6] and a few months later in the death of their father also. John was ten years old at this time and his oldest sister nineteen.[7] Uncle Thomas Gay took over the big house and the children with it, and held it until his death in 1702, as we learn from

[5] R. A. Lawrence, *North Devon Herald*, Dec. 7, 1882. "Among the pieces of timber carted away from the Barnstaple parish church [which is now undergoing restoration] has been found a portion of a pew, with the name 'John Gay,' and the date '1695' cut upon it. As the poet was then ten years old, his age renders it probable that this was his handiwork; and this may be regarded as almost certain when it is remembered that no other John Gay appeared in the parish register."

[6] G. A. Aitken, "John Gay," *Westminster Review*, CXL, 387 (Oct., 1893). "There is still in existence the manuscript of the funeral sermon upon Gay's mother, preached by the Reverend John Hanmer, her brother, from Coloss. i, 27, and with the sermon is a dedicatory letter to the widower:—'Dear Brother,— . . . Oh let the remembrance of her holy conversation be ever powerful to quicken you and yours to be followers of her as she was of Christ Jesus, that it may be seen that you have not forgotten that you were once favoured with such a wife, nor your children that they were once blessed with such a mother.' " Aitken establishes the exact date of birth.

[7] Joseph Besly Gribble, *Memorials of Barnstaple* (1830), p. 532. This sister married Anthony Baller, son of the Joseph Baller who left, by will dated March 3, 1711, an annuity of £10 for the benefit of the Meeting House for dissenters. This Joseph Baller was paying £10 church-rate for his home, Dawking's Park, in 1709, when the Joy Street house was assessed £10 13*s.*

a copy of the will of his nephew and heir, Jacob Palmer, to be found in the registry of the Archdeaconry of Barnstaple, dated January 28, 1735.

Item—I give, devise, and bequeath unto my said sone, William Palmer, clerk, all that my dwelling-house, situate, lying, and beeing att the Red Cross, in Joy-street, in Barnstaple, afforesaid, with the garden in the Castle Lane, there belonging to it, formerly given mee by the will of my uncle, Mr. Thomas *Gay*, lately deceased, and now in the possession of Mary Reed, spinster, and other tenants, to have and to hold the same and every of them with their and every of their appurtenances, unto the said William Palmer, clerke, his heires and assignes for ever, to the only proper use and behoofe of him, and his assignes for evermore.[8]

Whatever property there was in addition to the house—and I think there may have been a good deal—was presumably of the kind that evaporates rapidly. Much later, in 1713, suffering either from melancholy or nostalgia, as he always did when the subject of money came into his mind, the poet wrote:

> But I, who ne'er was bless'd from Fortune's Hand,
> Nor brighten'd Plough-shares in Paternal Land,
> Have long been in the noisie Town immur'd,
> Respir'd it's Smoak, and all it's Toils endur'd,
> Have courted Bus'ness with successless Pain,
> And in Attendance wasted Years in vain.[9]

No, there were no broad fields to give stability to the family fortunes. Gay might watch his cousins out at Frithelstock developing airs of large proprietorship, but he must turn elsewhere.

Probably Uncle Thomas did his best for these fatherless children. He had before long to buy commissions, to provide dowries, to arrange apprenticeships, and in the meantime this

[8] The big house must have added considerably to Jacob Palmer's rating with his fellow townsmen, for Gribble tells us in his *Memorials of Barnstaple* (p. 305): "1708. Jacob Palmer not having taken the sacrament after notice of election to office of Capital Burgess, was fined £40. Present the Mayor, Aldermen, and most of the Common Council. The said Jacob Palmer was afterwards sworn into office." He occasionally conformed.

[9] *The Poetical Works of John Gay*, ed. G. C. Faber (1926), p. 655.

ten-year-old in whom we happen to be interested must be sent to the Grammar School and given a decent education, certainly not on the foundation.

The boy would not have far to go, for the school was housed in a small building called St. Anne's Chantry in back of the Barnstaple church, only a short distance from the Gay house. In those days and down until 1760 it was used on Sundays as a meetinghouse for the French refugees who had descended surprisingly upon Barnstaple after the repeal of the Edict of Nantes. This little schoolhouse was originally a chapel built over the charnel house of the parish cemetery,[10] and ghostly stories about the bones of ancestors may have given the place an eerie quality in the minds of the boys, at any rate in the evening light or when they heard the droning accents of an unknown language come through the open door as the French Protestants conducted divine service. Architectural evidence suggests the early fifteenth century for the date of the building, though fanciful archaeologists have captured an Irish saint Sabinus of the ninth century as patron at its foundation. Nicholas Carlisle, the best authority, says, "It is not known at what period, or by whom the Grammar School at Barnstaple was founded; though it may certainly boast of a remote origin, and has attained celebrity from the eminent Characters which it has produced."[11] Among these he lists Dr. John Jewel, the good Bishop of Salisbury, John Gay, the poet, Aaron Hill, the dramatic writer, Samuel Musgrave, M.D., the learned editor of Euripides. He neglects to mention William Fortescue, who, like Aaron Hill, was a schoolfellow of John Gay's and who later became Master of the Rolls. William Rayner,[12] Gay's first teacher in this old school, became Master at the death of Nathaniel Viner in 1680 and held the position until 1698, when he transferred to Tiverton. He was succeeded at Barnstaple

[10] J. R. Oliver, *Monasticon Diocesis Exoniensis* (Exeter, 1846), p. 197.

[11] *A Concise Description of the Endowed Grammar Schools in England and Wales* (1818), I, 242.

[12] J. R. Chanter, *Memorials, Descriptive and Historical of the Church of St. Peter, Barnstaple* (Barnstaple, 1882), pp. 107 ff. Rayner was a donor to the Church Library, started by the Reverend John Doddridge with a gift of one hundred and twelve volumes. Rayner gave two.

by the Reverend Robert Luck, a brilliant young High Churchman, fresh from Westminster and Christ Church, where he no doubt thought himself already famous as the author of *An Admirable Queen,*[13] a piece offered to King William in a book of poems on the death of Queen Mary. This young man was full of bright ideas and presently started the habit of giving an annual Grammar School play. One of these performances was adapted from Terence's *The Self-Tormentor* and was fortified with both prologue and epilogue written by Luck himself and supported still further by a school cantata, *Scena Barumensis,* composed by the same master hand and sung by the boys. On that occasion, it seems, Luck found his audience inappreciative, but from us the man deserves some applause even at this late date. He could not have set the world on fire even if he had obtained the sun's chariot for a day, as Kitty, the Duchess of Queensberry, does in some of his saccharine verses called *The Female Phaeton,* but he did succeed in making some of these boys of his fall in love with song and poetry, and the birth when it came was not prodigious but beautiful. "It is easy to observe," writes Luck in the preface to his *Miscellany of New Poems on several Occasions. By R. Luck, A.M. Master of Barnstaple School. Containing also, The Loves of Hero and Leander, Translated from the Greek of Musaeus,* published by Edward Cave in 1736,[14]

> It is easy to observe from the Subjects, or the Dates of several of my little Poems, that I have been occasionally an humble Servant of the Muses for almost half a Century. . . . This Candour I shall hope, because I have endeavour'd to deserve it, from those Gentlemen, whom I have had the Honour to Educate. They ought (I think) to read my Performances as Favourably as I examin'd Theirs. One of that Number, now a Great, and (what is more valuable) a very good Man, will forgive the Liberty I take to print his Translation of the 15th Ode of Hor. Epod. done by him when Young under my Care. I read it then with too much Pleasure ever to forget it. 'Tis to gratify his Modesty I conceal his Name.

[13] Sidney Harper, "The History of the Drama in Barnstaple," *Transactions of the Devonshire Association,* XLIX, 416-428 (read at Barnstaple, July 26, 1917).

[14] Luck had published the year before a Latin poem called *Abramis,* a translation of which appeared with an anonymous poem called *The Art of Life* (1737).

This compliment to Fortescue (then risen to high office as baron of the exchequer) shows the perspicacity of which Luck made good use in his manner of launching this small ship of his Apollonian treasures. Gay, his most distinguished pupil, had died four years before this book was printed. Luck turns then to Queensberry, Gay's distinguished patron:

O *Queensberry!* cou'd happy *Gay*
This Off'ring to thee bring,
'Tis his, my Lord, (he'd smiling say)
Who taught your *Gay* to sing.

One wonders whether the picture of that smiling face flitted past in the memory of the old schoolmaster as he wrote these lines. At any rate, all Gay's old friends willingly subscribed for the stupid verses, William Fortescue, David Mallet, Alexander Pope (two copies), Henry St. John Esq., among them.[15]

But Robert Luck's later fortunes are not our special concern. In those years about the turn of the century he sat day after day with forty boys in front of him, and John Gay was among those boys. Just how stimulating were those classroom exercises? Was this schoolmaster always busy pumping paradigms or did he sometimes slip into the playway and cultivate intellectual strength with joy?[16]

He certainly developed in these boys an interest in plays and music. The town had always been liberal in its support of such things whether it was the King's Players who arrived or mere strollers, though a regular theatre was not established until 1768. Two of these boys, Aaron Hill and Gay, were later to be closely associated with Handel and thus attest their love of music, which certainly did not develop spontaneously in later life. Indeed, the first work that Handel did after his arrival in England was to provide the music for Aaron Hill's *Rinaldo*, and one of his most gracious lighter pieces is the serenata *Acis and Galatea*, the libretto for which Gay himself wrote.

[15] Gribble, *op. cit.*, p. 308. Luck was at last appreciated even in his own country. "1738. Portraits of the following individuals were placed in the Guildhall: 'Henry Beavis, Mayor . . . Robt. Luck, Clerk, Master of Grammar School.'" He retired from his post as Master of the Grammar School in 1740 to become Vicar of West Down and died on Jan. 17, 1747.

[16] *Ibid.*, pp. 523-524.

Luck did far more for his boys than stimulate them on the road to musical frivolities. He made them work at their classical languages. That copy of Mattaire's *Horace* which belonged to Gay and which is now in the Forster Collection at South Kensington is well worn and thumbed and annotated in a way that does not suggest the idler. This book, published by Tonson and Watts in 1715, is of course the copy Gay used as a man, when such schoolboy enthusiasms are too apt to be forgotten. The boys translated Latin verse into English verse, as Luck himself back in Westminster had done again and again, in a way that must have ruined many a possible poet, if poets can be ruined. Periphrasis in such exercises can scarcely be escaped, for lines must be filled out. Rhyming tags soon become part of the equipment of schoolboys, as necessary to them as pencils or schoolbags. The process, however, does not seem to have ruined Gay; it does not seem even to have destroyed his love for Latin poetry. Horace and Ovid were his first literary enthusiasms, and he never lost his liking for them. His "Story of Arachne" from Ovid was published among his earliest poems in Lintot's *Miscellany* of 1712, and his translations from Book IX of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* found a place in that most popular book of the eighteenth century, Garth's *Ovid*. What stimulus such exercises may have given him to try his hand at original verse back there in his school days it is impossible to tell. Now that the authenticity of those poems in Henry Lee's little volume, *Gay's Chair*, has been so seriously questioned,[17] we can no longer even speculate on the boy's 'prentice habits. One of Gay's school friends, the Reverend Charles Hill, Rector of Instow, remembered pleasantly that Gay's poetic abilities were first discovered by some lines he wrote on the death of a swallow.[18] The story sounds apocryphal. This boy, brought up as he was on Horace, would value the observing eye and sharpness of wit rather than sentimentalities of that sort; his prevailing mood, as we know, would grow to be increasingly *vive la bagatelle*, and when he

[17] *The Poetical Works of John Gay*, pp. 671 ff.

[18] This anecdote comes from a footnote in Baller's "Memoir" in *Gay's Chair; Poems never before Printed . . .* (1819), p. 14. This book was edited by Henry Lee, who issued a second edition from Boston in 1820.

saw the shining body of the fish struck with smart pain shoot through the boiling waters of the tiny brook he would share the joy of the fisherman, but as poet be ready with his bright comparison, having noticed already that men and women and their doings are more interesting than swallows or fish.

> So the Coquet th' unhappy Youth ensnares,
> With artful Glances and affected Airs,
> Baits him with Frowns, now lures him on with Smiles,
> And in Disport employs her practis'd Wiles;
> The Boy at last, betray'd by borrow'd Charms,
> A Victim falls in her enslaving Arms.[19]

Whether Gay learned Italian under Luck's guidance one cannot say positively. He learned it somehow and made translations from Ariosto, which, however, were not published until 1910,[20] and—as Archdeacon Coxe pointed out as long ago as 1796—his works show occasional echoes of his reading in Italian literature.[21] He knew little enough French before 1713, though he must have become familiar with that language soon after, or his later usefulness to Lord Clarendon on the trip to Hanover would be very questionable. His amusing account of an attempt to write to his boyhood friend, William Fortescue, in French, is still extant. The letter was written in Moor Park when Gay was enjoying a holiday there and is dated October 5, 1713.

DEAR SIR: You must know that I yesterday made an attempt to repay you with a letter in French, and having no Dictionary and being but a poor proficient in that polite tongue I was forced to give over this grand undertaking. I had begun to acquaint you that I was last week a Shooting with my Lord Essex, who leaves England next week to make the tour of Italy and France; and when I came to the word Shooting I was forced to express myself in a Poetical Manner by having recourse to Boileau, and call it

Faire le [*sic*] Guerre aux habitans de l'Air,

[19] *Rural Sports* (first version, 1713), lines 197-202, in *The Poetical Works of John Gay*, p. 659.

[20] J. D. Bruce (ed.), "Some Unpublished Translations from Ariosto by John Gay," *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen*, CXXIII, 279-297 (1910).

[21] *The Fables of John Gay*, ed. William Coxe (1796), p. 67 n.

and when I would have told you that we owed our game to dogs called Pointers I was obliged in a tedious circumlocution to tell you that we had dogs that lying themselves down, would direct us to the birds, and when I would have acquainted you with our Success, I could not find a word for Poachers after a half an hour study. Beside if I had proceeded I consider'd I should have wholly neglected Sentiments and only just filled up a paper with French phrases that I could at the time have recollected; for if I was to accost a French Man, I should certainly begin with that impertinent compliment, Monsieur, Comment vous portez-vous? and a hundred to one if we were consulting a Sun dial to show my Learning, I should add—Quelle heure est-il? and should haul into our discourse some other as insignificant question which I had just learned in my grammar. I hope these reasons will satisfy you for my not writing in an unknown tongue. Here's a melancholy prospect before my eyes; I am now looking upon the Grove which is now every day losing its shade; and alas what is a Grove without a shade; the leaves fall; the Bowling Green is wet; the Roads are dirty and I almost wish to be in London, where Pope has been all this Summer, and Budgell is still of the same opinion when I last saw him which is about a month since that all the Ladies are rascals.[21]

Before Gay's visits to the Continent his ability to read French was probably greater than his power in composition or in speech; certainly as a schoolboy, like most youngsters of his time until they had had a chance to make the grand tour, he knew little enough of that polite tongue. Instead, he knew something of Greek.

Some biographers have imagined coldness between teacher and pupil and suggested that the Reverend Robert Luck was so shrewdly encased in his High Church principles that he would scorn this boy whose maternal uncles were Dissenters and took him to the Castle Meeting from Sunday to Sunday. That may be true, but one must remember that the Gays themselves were not Dissenters, and in any case the chances are that Luck sloughed off his avid partisanship when he entered the class-

[22] The original of this letter was formerly owned by Mr. F. B. Sabin of London. but is now in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. I quote only part of it.

room. It is idle to suppose that he divided his boys—Gay and Aaron Hill and Fortescue and the rest—into sheep and goats according to family politics. The boys might find him different sometimes outside of school, and on election day might smile to see this man who had gently quizzed them on the urbanities of Horace, fired with Juvenalian enthusiasm, gesticulating damnation on all Whigs and Dutchmen and ladling out good Tory punch to red-faced burgesses, but in school the violence of party was probably forgotten.

Gay's school education was a very good one; his mind was roused and his imagination fired by contact with great literature, while at his desk in that tiny schoolroom horizons undoubtedly grew wider. But a boy is not at the desk all day long and imaginative stimulus does not come altogether from the words of the master. He was about the streets much of the time, in the great open market, down by the quay, standing openmouthed before some ne'er-do-well's queer gaping face set in the stocks, or running after the beadle to watch him thwack the raw flesh of whore or tippler. What sort of place was Barnstaple in those days as a nursery for genius? Was it a backwater reflecting nothing but the moss and sedges of an earlier time, or was it in the strong current of events, answering in its smaller eddies the main drive of national affairs? What kind of stories were told by the old men on the alehouse benches or round the fireplace in the evening when the children teased their elders for more and more?

In the first place, a good deal of the talk at the street corners and in the house would be about trade. Barnstaple was a large trading center, and many of the Gays were themselves tradesmen. The town had an open market for the countryside, but far more important than that, it had developed—in spite of the fact that it was seven miles up river—a large foreign trade, mainly in woollens and tobacco. Not much later than the period of which we are thinking Barnstaple was named as one of the eight ports of England to which the importation of woollen goods from Ireland was limited by Statute, 12 George II,

1739.[23] Direct importations of various other goods were made during the first quarter of the century from Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, Norway, Newfoundland, and various parts of North and South America, from the latter chiefly tobacco, of which single article importations to the extent of £54,700 odd in duty were entered in the Customs House in two years only, 1727 and 1728. All this would not interest the boys and girls in that Gay family very much, except that when the spirit of enterprise is abroad all are touched by it, more especially the young. What John Gay and his brothers and sisters would be interested in at that time would be the romance of trade, the stories the sailors down at the quay told about far countries, about mermen with black moustaches on the Hudson, anthropophagi, or if they had no power over mermen and anthropophagi, about Newfoundland fishermen hanging their catch to dry in the parching winds, about Indian wars and Turkish pirates. Gay might even remember stories his father had told him about Matthew, the youngest of that group of brothers, the one who had died in Barbados back in 1687. And as for Aunt Martha and the way she had plunged her fortune in that same new world venture and finally landed in Newgate and had to stay there for two or three years as a prisoner for debt—the children would know all that.[24] Aunt Martha had at one time employed William Gay, the poet's father, as her agent in Barnstaple and probably was a frequent visitor at the Red Cross.[25] If she ever appeared in person to horrify the children with her stories of the old London gaol, she doubtless told them

[23] J. R. Chanter, *Sketches of some Striking Incidents in the History of Barnstaple* (Barnstaple, 1865), p. 29.

[24] Nov. 7, 1681, to Sept. 3, 1683. Some of these stories come from the unpublished papers of the Pinney family at Racedown, one of whom, Nathaniel Pinney, married Aunt Martha's daughter, Naomi Gay.

[25] Account of Martha Gay with her son-in-law Thomas Walden: "To money remitted by William Gay and paid you by various people, one in London, as by your own account one hundred and fifteen pounds." The old lady, Martha Gay of Bristol, finally died at Bettiscombe, the seat of the Pinneys, if we may judge by the receipted drug bill dated Nov. 22, 1700, but not paid for five years: "Rec'd Aprill 27: 1705 of Mr. Nathaniel Pinney by order of Mrs. Hester Gay, one of the executrix of Mrs. Martha Gay dec:d Five pounds nine shillings in full of this bill and all accounts by me. Robt. Sheffield."

Mrs. Nathaniel Pinney of Bettiscombe, Gay's cousin.
By kind permission of Lady Pinney

about Isaac Dennis, who was Keeper at that time, and how she had had to pay the old swindler three shillings and sixpence a week for the right sort of accommodation. When the old lady had grown tired of her entertainment in the house on Joy Street or had recovered perhaps temporarily from the effect of the vast quantities of drugs she was continually pouring into herself, she would announce her intention to visit her daughter, Mrs. Nathaniel Pinney, over in Bettiscombe, and maybe tell the children once again all about Azariah Pinney, that rash young follower of Monmouth about whose neck the hangman's noose had dangled until his sister Hester, who kept a lace-shop in the New Exchange, emptied the till of sixty-five pounds to save him and finally set him up in business in St. Nevis.

The line of trade, fortunes made and unmade with startling rapidity, the inflationary policies of William III's government, all this paper-credit and the queer idea of a National Debt—these serious topics were mulled over in the hearing of the boys again and again.

The lure of trade was very closely connected then as now with the glories of war. What glory there could possibly be about the sad collapse of Sedgemoor and its cynical sequel as the great Protestant Duke vowed to turn Catholic if his royal uncle would only spare his life, it is hard to say now. The real character of Monmouth made no difference to boys or men in those days, veiled as it was by official secrecies; actually he was a symbol for the Protestant interest. Popish plots, against which he was supposed to be the sole bulwark, still turned the air red in the imaginations of men. Moreover, Monmouth had vigorously set himself against the French influence, which in the minds of Englishmen meant not only the Pope and wooden shoes but trade competition, an even more serious matter. Conscience and pocketbook were both involved. These Barnstaple burghers shared the larger loyalties of trade. Their politics had been Whiggish before the name was known. The big civil wars of the mid-century were of course over before William Gay, the poet's father, was born, but Barnstaple even then was for Par-

liament against King Charles. All but three of her twenty-five burgesses were Parliament men. Though isolated and forced twice in spite of her heavy fortifications to yield to the royal forces, Barnstaple remained recalcitrant and gave an enthusiastic welcome to Commonwealth troops when they finally came to her assistance in the last year of the war.[26] Prince Charles himself had in the meantime spent over a month at Barnstaple in June, 1645, as guest in the Beaple mansion on Southgate Street, now called High Street. His hostess was Grace Beaple, widow of one of the town's big merchants and a Gay herself, though but distantly related to the poet's family.[27] Mrs. Beaple survived his visit for five years, and no doubt found frequent opportunities to show friends and strangers the room where the exiled Prince Charles had slept, the furnishings of which, according to an inventory of her goods and chattels in the uncatalogued muniments of Exeter Cathedral, were worth "£25. 9s. 00d. ffor ye goods in ye Starechamber," a better room, I fancy, than any Gay's family at the Red Cross could show.

We may suppose that the stories about this old war were by 1700 growing rather vague and that the boys would hear more about the Monmouth uprising[28] or about the wars against

[26] R. W. Cotton, *Barnstaple and the Northern Part of Devonshire during the Great Civil War, 1642-1646* (1889), p. 83.

[27] The Reverend J. F. Chanter, "Charles, Prince of Wales, at Barnstaple, and his Hostess," *Transactions of the Devonshire Association*, XLIX, 389 (read at Barnstaple, July 26, 1917).

[28] *Reprint of the Barnstaple Records* (published by J. R. Chanter and Thomas Wainwright, Barnstaple, 1900), II, 163. In the hectic year 1685, the Borough Accounts show payments which suggest that the city fathers nourished the healthy wish to be reckoned on the winning side:

"Paid several persons for riding scout, each 6s. 8d.

Paid for fetching the great guns and drawing them to their several posts, £3. 4s.

Paid for bringing back horses and other things, when the prisoners were carried to Exon, 16s.

Spent when news came that King Charles was recovered, £2. 10s.

Item for ringers and sending messengers to Justice Lovett and Colonel Bassett, 13s.

Item spent at the news of the taking of the Duke of Monmouth, £1. Os. Od.

Item spent when King James was proclaimed, in wine and beer, £9. 19s. 6d.

Item spent at the news of the routing of the rebels, £2.

Paid for ale for the ringers, the 6th February, 1s.

Spend in a treat for Sir John Rolls and other gentlemen, and Sir Arthur Chichester, £4. 18s.

And for several barrells of strong beer for the country souldiers, £3. 12s.

Paid expenses for the reception of the Duke of Albemarle, £1. 10s."

France—the wars which were before long to take the poet's brother, young Jonathan Gay, from home to fight as lieutenant and finally as captain under the great general. The flag of England—not yet the Union Jack—was on the seven seas, and Barnstaple as well as London was tinged no doubt with that weird complex of emotions which we call patriotism. Young John Gay may have been slightly puzzled when on election day he saw the flag used indifferently by the contesting parties as an excuse for their vociferations and the so-called patriots defaming fellow citizens with savage bitterness, for "party" in this sense was a fresh phenomenon in the eyes of men, prodigious offspring that it was of the glorious Revolution. Barnstaple must often have witnessed scenes like the Norfolk election described in *The Weekly Journal* for Saturday, March 5, 1714. This has some interest for us as Sir Thomas Hanmer, to whom it relates, was a distant kinsman of Gay's.

Norwich, Feb. 19, Yesterday came on the Election for the County of Norfolk, where the Mob having gathered in a strong Body, fell upon Sir *Ralph Hare* and Col. *Earle's* Party, Knock'd them so out-ragiously with Brick-ends and Stones, that even Sir Tho. Hanmer, Sir Ralph Hare, Col. Earl and their Friends, were obliged to quit their Tents to save their Lives; Notwithstanding which 2 of them were Mortally wounded, and another had one of his Eyes Cut out, and several others were horridly cut and mangled; whether this Bloody Usage proceeded from the Natural Aversion the *Faction* have to the Clergy, who appear'd very Numerous at Sir Ralph's Tent, or because they were Gaul'd to see so Worthy a Patriot as Sir Tho. Hanmer, appear in the Interest of the Church Party I cannot determine: Be it as it will, they did it, and Sir Jacob Astley and Mr. de Gray, having the Majority were Declared.

Violence and bribery were the usual tools of the politician. One election cost a total of fourteen hundred and sixty pounds.

For bespeaking and collecting a mob, £20; For Roarers of the word Church, £40; for a set of No-Roundhead Roarers, £40; For several gallons of Tory punch on church tomb-stones, £30; For a majority of clubs and brandy-bottles, £20; For dissenter damners.

. . . For demolishing two Houses . . . committing two riots . . . for a gang of Aldermen abusers . . . &c., &c.[29]

We can scarcely imagine that Gay with scenes like these about him in his boyhood would be stupid enough to confuse party with principle any more than Swift did. In later life he always made friends irrespective of party and displayed so much casual agility in the difficult art of sitting on fences comfortably that some of his modern biographers have wondered what his opinions were on politics, or even whether he had any.

The expanding avenues of trade, the glories of British arms, the new vagaries of politics—all were thrust on the gaze of this Barnstaple boy eager to find a place for himself in the world. He must have been continually conscious also of the bitterness of religious division. Were not those Huguenots a symbol of man's inhumanity to man in the boy's imagination? They had landed in Barnstaple on the first of December, 1685, the very year that the poet was born. We learn the story from the memoirs of one of them, James Fontaine, as he was later called. Gay would learn it from the lips of his father and uncle and out on the street corners—how the ship with the refugees on board came into the harbor on Sunday morning just as the good people of Barnstaple were coming from church, how one well-to-do citizen took a couple of the strangers to the shelter of his home and others followed suit, so that God raised up for them fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters in a strange land. Fontaine tells how shocked he was by the savage punishment that had been meted out to Monmouth's followers.

I was told by the Presbyterians, that the unfortunate people who had been executed after the Duke of Monmouth's rebellion a few days before our arrival, and whose heads and quarters I saw exposed on all the towers, gates and cross-roads, looking absolutely like butchers' shambles, had many of them been guilty of no crime but that of being Presbyterians.[30]

[29] Elizabeth Handasyde, *Granville the Polite* (1933), p. 121.

[30] The Reverend James Fontaine, *A Tale of the Huguenots* (New York, 1838). The MS, which was written in 1722 in Dublin, had to wait until 1838 for translation

Puzzled suffering in what they supposed to be the cause of religion was the lot of many people in the England of that time. Gay's immediate family had not escaped. His mother's people, the Hanmers, were Calvinists, and when the boy went to see his uncle, the Reverend John Hanmer, he would hear many stories of what had happened to people who refused to acquiesce in Edward Hyde's definitions of true religion. This uncle of Gay's was, as Calamy describes him, "a star of the first magnitude" in the dissenting community and in these later days had been free to exercise his calling without interruption. His father, the Reverend Jonathan Hanmer, in spite of his wealth and family connections, his Cambridge education and his power as a preacher, had been ejected from his livings in the neighborhood of Barnstaple back in 1662 at the time of the Act of Uniformity. He was the man who on the Indulgence finally gave up his connection with the Established Church and formed a congregation at Barnstaple known as the Castle Meeting.[31] Neither of these Hanmers would, like Hobbes, make the King's conscience the standard for his own. Neither of them lacked oratorical power. Indeed, one almost suspects homiletic fireworks, especially when one reads in Calamy such an account of the older Hanmer as this: "His lectures at Barnstaple were greatly thronged, many attending who lived many miles distant; and some of them persons of character and distinction." The boy Gay would not of course remember this grandfather as he had died in 1687 advanced in age and in the respect of the community.

Yes, over at Uncle John Hanmer's the small boy would hear a different brand of stories, some no doubt very improving,

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and publication by one of Fontaine's descendants. M. Castel edited a French version, published at Toulouse in 1877. He believed in the general credibility of the author.

Fontaine himself was taken into the home of a Mr. Downe, and before long found his whole armour of fence and defence strained to the utmost by the amorous approaches of his host's sister, the lady of the house. He took refuge desperately in immediate marriage with his French fiancée—a marriage recorded properly in the Barnstaple Parish Register—and in departure to Taunton, where he later prospered as a merchant in linens.

[31] The Reverend J. F. Chanter, *The Life and Times of Martin Blake, B.D., 1593-1673* (1910), p. 159.

but others not lacking in humor, for John Hanmer seems to have been a kindly man, respected for "the sweetness of his temper, his learning, the judgment, and exactness of his composures, and the gravity and seriousness with which they were delivered." He would tell stories about Cambridge, the Cambridge that Milton knew, stories about delinquent parsons, possibly about the Reverend John Trender, former vicar of the Barnstaple Church, whose doings became at one time such a scandal that they found a permanent place in the diary of the Town Clerk, Philip Wyot.

> Mr. John Trender, vicar of this town, inveighd in his sermon agt the Aldermen for not coming to church, whom he said were like 2 fat oxen, that they would not hear when X calld unto them but drew backwards and drew others from X, the aldermen were present but unseen, for this and his indecent behaviour on being questioned for this abuse he was committed to warde for want of sureties—the E. of Bath next day discharged him.[32]

Afterwards Trender was jailed again, because he had been found tippling with a pipe and tabor a little after nine. It took the united efforts of the Bishop of Exeter and the Earl of Bath to set him free this time. "Sunday following he preachd ij hours, beinge a cold daye he weryed all his audience." One hopes that his friend, the Earl of Bath, was forewarned of this prospect of revenge and stayed away from church that morning.

This was the rather undignified form that church squabbles were likely to take in the seventeenth century, and Gay would hear many stories of this kind and, I think, laugh over the absurdities of folk who took their religion so seriously. His uncle would tell him too about those preaching tournaments which were a delight and challenge to some gifted young parsons at the time. They preached by the hour glass, as Dryden tells us, and did not hesitate to turn it over at least once. The best of these stories was the one about the Reverend John Howe, who according to Calamy was competing in 1656 with Robert Jagoe for the post of minister at Dartmouth.[33] The votes for the two

[32] J. R. Chanter, *Sketches of the Literary History of Barnstaple*, p. 104.
[33] Edmund Calamy, *The Nonconformists Memorial* (1775), I, 350-351.

candidates were equal. A friend of Howe's happened to mention the difficulty to Cromwell, and Oliver agreed to act as referee. A time was set for the sermon and a text chosen.

While the Psalm was singing, *Cromwel,* that he might the better be able to judge whether or no he was that great man that he had been represented, sent a gentleman to him with a note, requiring him to preach upon another text mentioned in the note. Mr. *Howe* desired the Clerk to sing a little longer than usual, and preached upon that text for a full hour, turned up the hourglass, held on till it was run out, and was about to turn it a second time, when *Cromwel* gave him the sign to stop, and he broke off. The protector was so pleased with his performance, that he declared Mr. *Howe* should not go to *Dartmouth,* but should be his chaplain.

And when that story had been comfortably talked over and digested, questions about Cromwell and his Ironsides asked and answered, the boy would want to know more about those Indians out in New England for the conversion of whom his uncle was always collecting money; and then the older man would go over to his desk and get out the bunch of letters which grandfather had received from John Eliot thanking him for his readiness to help forward the cause of the Gospel by the generous supplies which he procured and sent over. Even the Mather family might come into the conversation, for had not Nathaniel Mather, Harvard Master of Arts, been at one time Vicar of the Barnstaple Church?[34]

This uncle, John Hanmer, was always very kind to John Gay, and of that kindness we shall find further evidence very soon. He was a learned as well as a kindly man. He knew medicine almost as well as divinity, and even dabbled in poetry. He was a man of disturbingly regular habits, got up at four or five in the morning,

remained in his Study till the Time of Family Prayer; soon after which, he went to his Study again till about Noon: And then, after necessary Refreshment with Eating and Walking, and a little Discoursing, he would return to his Study again, and there continue till

[34] Edmund Calamy, *A Continuation of the account of the ministers . . . ejected . . . after 1660* (1727), I, 257.

the lateness of the Evening was answerable to the Earliness of the Morning.[35]

The poet would hear more about colleges and the joys of learning and even about poetry at the homes of at least two other uncles, the Reverend John Gay out at Frithelstock, who had been a commoner at Exeter College, Oxford, and the Reverend James Gay, Rector of Meath, a Cambridge man who was presently to send two of his sons up to St. John's.

It would seem, then, even from so brief a sketch of the poet's early surroundings as this, that Barnstaple and the Gay connection there had much to offer by way of stimulus to the growing mind and fire to the imagination. But whether the boy thought of trade or war, of scholarship or poetry, all aspiration as he grew to manhood became somehow converged on London, on that road which led along a muddy marsh overflowed by the tide to those distant hills over which his brother had gone to join the colors of Marlborough. London was the center of all his thoughts, and whatever direction fate might give to his later career, London would provide the clue. Uncle Thomas Gay died in 1702, and presumably about that time, at the age of seventeen, the boy set out for the city.

II

Now a cousin of the Gay family, Hester Pinney, kept a lace-shop on the Strand, and it may well have been through her good offices that the boy John was finally placed as an apprentice in the household and shop of a silk mercer on that same street. This arrangement was normal enough at that time. Younger sons of county families often got their start in life in this way, and many of them lived to indulge themselves in sneers of superior scorn when they thought of their country cousins whose limited round of fox hunting and heavy drinking

[35] Calamy, *The Nonconformists Memorial*, I, 438. See also H. W. Gardiner, *Biographical Life of Hanmer* (Barnstaple, 1828), p. 36; Gribble, *op. cit.*, p. 507. In May, 1672, John Hanmer was assistant to Oliver Beard, minister to the dissenting congregation at Barnstaple; in May, 1692, co-pastor; on Sept. 9, 1696, pastor. The congregation divided in 1705. Hanmer did not long survive separation. See Dr. Calamy's *Continuation*, cited above. These facts come from an account in MS by the Reverend Samuel Badcock, 1777, one of their ministers.

left nothing but mould on their minds to record the passing of the years. Hopefully, then, the youngster came to town, that town of which he was to become the laureate unrivaled by all the city poets. What opportunity he had at this time to practice the art of walking the streets of London we can only guess. He seems to have lived with an amiable master, who would make the routine life in the shop as little irksome to the country-bred lad as possible. This master was evidently not at all like many of the men into whose hands the law put powers almost of life and death after those fateful papers of apprenticeship had once been signed. Misson, the French traveler, tells a vivid story of the fortunes and misfortunes of London 'prentices in those days,[36] but such a commonplace advertisement as the following from *The Weekly Journal or Saturday's Post*, July 16, 1720, suggests even better than he some sinister aspects of the arrangement which have fortunately long been forgotten.

Whereas Charles Vandersman, about 16 Years of Age, wearing a brown Great Coat, his own light brown Hair, went away from his Master, Mr. Elliot, Joyner in Heath-Cock-Court in the Strand, on Monday the 4th Instant. This is to warn all People from entertaining the said Lad at their Peril; and whoever brings him to his said Master shall receive 5s. Reward, and reasonable Charges.

Gay's master was not of this sort; none of the early biographers suggest friction between him and his apprentice. They merely transfer a share of their own snobbery to the poet, imagine him bored with his humble duties, fancy that he already recognized in himself a "genius for high excellencies," eager thus prematurely to arise and shine. William Ayre, in the *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Alexander Pope, Esq.* (1745), gives a graphic account of these early days in the life of Gay.

The Trade which he chose to be put Apprentice to, was a Mercer, but he grew so fond of Reading and Study, that he frequently neglected to exert himself in putting off Silks and Velvets to the Ladies, and suffer'd them (by reason of his wanting to finish the Sale in too few Words) to go to other Shops, where they might be kept longer in Play; this Way of Gossipping about among the Silk

[36] François Misson, *Memoires et observations* (la Haye, 1698), p. 7.

Mercers, is said to be practis'd among young Ladies, often for Amusement, or to cure the Vapours, when in Reality they want tc purchase nothing: Not being able to go thro' this Slavery, and doing what he did in the Shop with a mind quite bent another Way, his Master seldom put him forward to serve, but some other, who had the Business more at Heart: By Degrees Mr. *Gay* became entirely to absent himself from the Shop, and at last, by Agreement with his Master, to withdraw from it, and retire into the Country.[37]

This description does at any rate take us within the shop, and has also the virtue of suggesting that Gay was a hard reader thus early in his life. Whether the accompanying hint of his indifference either to silks or to ladies be correct is quite another question. His poems, especially *Trivia,* contain plenty of evidence to show his knowledge of and interest in dress and in materials. And can one really suppose him indifferent to the duchesses or the sweet Molly Moggs who sought his help in choosing their fine array! In spite of what Ayre says, Gay was a profitable servant. We learn from the earliest letter that has come down to us that he was accustomed to execute detailed commissions for his friends in Devonshire, some of which no doubt brought cash into his master's till.

Coz Dennis,—I sent your bed away last Thursday sevennight, the carriage paid to Exon, directed to Mr. Atkeys, as you ordered. The bed comes to £16 and with it I sent you an easy chair, of the same as the bed, which my mistress advised me, being very useful and fashionable: she hath made the best sort; it comes to £3. I hope they will please you. I am at present much out of order, I have not heard as yet what the frames that the bed and chair are put up in, comes to; but I will not fail of giving an account of everything in a post or two. I have sent you herein the carrier's note for the carriage. Pray tell coz Richard Parmynter, that Mr. Rolles hath paid me for his neckcloths. My service to all friends.

I am, your loving friend,
and humble servant,
John Gay

To Mr. Nich. Denoys, merchant,
in Barnstaple.

[37] II, 97.

This letter was dated January 10, 1706, and was probably written shortly before Gay threw up his apprenticeship.[38] One can see how the young man, puzzled about the beds and easy chairs that he was to buy for his cousin, sought advice from his mistress on what was "useful and fashionable." It has a hint also of what may have been the cause for Gay's radical change of plans. "I am at present much out of order," he says. Now Gay was not likely to talk about minor physical ailments. The subject of his financial embarrassments, we shall learn later, often bored his friends, but he rarely worried them about his health, or at least not without real cause. It may well be that at about this time he was beginning to find that the long hours and confinement actually did affect his health and that he was forced to give up his work and go back home for a rest. His nephew, the Reverend Joseph Baller, writes much later, in 1777, that Gay felt a "remarkable depression of spirits," and we can imagine that this was scarcely the melancholy to disperse which he had but to throw a stone, but some more serious physical derangement.[39]

Whatever the cause, in the summer of 1706, about halfway through the usual term, Gay was released from his engagements and went back to Barnstaple, where he stayed for some months at the home of his mother's brother, the Reverend John Hanmer, possibly until Hanmer's death on July 19, 1707, forced him once more into action.

III

He returned to London this time with extremely vague plans about the future. All he knew was that he did not wish to continue in the business world, and since he was ill qualified for any professional work and not quite well enough connected to expect immediate patronage, he undertook the first task that came to hand, a secretarial post with his boyhood friend, Aaron

[38] This letter was printed in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for May, 1822. It has recently reappeared with facsimile in *Unpublished Letters from the Collections of John Wild*, ed. R. N. Carew Hunt (1930), p. 22.

[39] See Baller's memoir of Gay in *Gay's Chair; Poems never before Printed . . .* (1819).

Hill. We learn this from several sources, particularly from Edward Parker's *Key* to *Three Hours after Marriage* (1717), which tells of Gay's start in life as amanuensis to Aaron Hill when the latter set on foot his question-and-answer project, *The British Apollo,* in 1708. Another pamphlet speaks of the connection between the two friends lasting until 1712, when Gay helped Hill launch the famous scheme for extracting oil from beech-mast. Aaron Hill was a young man of wealth and social position, kinsman of Lord Paget and friend of Peterborough, with a mind—even thus early—full of fresh projects, among which in 1708 were starting *The British Apollo,* writing and producing his first play, and publishing his magnificent folio of travels in the Ottoman Empire. A few months later he was chosen manager of Drury Lane theatre, though this distinction proved acutely embarrassing and short-lived. He was energetic, erratic, a good promoter, with virtues highly appreciated by the usual run of coffeehouse minds, and Gay might well have begun his professional career in worse company.

Hill then is the answer to at least some of our queries about those three—for us—barren years of Gay's life (1708-1711). Hill not only seemed but was extremely busy and needed someone about to help him, today with this, tomorrow with that, someone both versatile and intelligent, someone who was presentable in society. Hill helped Gay publish his first poem, introduced him to his friends, employed him in his multifarious businesses, and doubtless gave him money for services rendered. This association with Hill was well known and remembered even after Gay's death, for, when Richard Savage undertook to write a life of Gay in 1736, someone told him to ask Hill for information about the poet's early years. Unfortunately, Hill was busy as usual when the query came and referred Savage to Budgell and Pope, to Budgell particularly for the beginning of Gay's life, adding only the facts that came immediately to mind—the publication of *Wine,* Gay's employment in the Monmouth household, and his expedition to Hanover.[40]

[40] *The Works of Aaron Hill, Esq; in Four Volumes . . .* (1753), I, 338. Hill to Savage, June 23, 1736.

"I would willingly satisfy the curiosity of your friend, in relation to Mr. *Gay,* if

With Aaron Hill at his elbow, Gay would find himself in contact continually with three different sets of literary people: those gentlemen of leisure who wrote pretty verses from time to time and published them at their own expense—no doubt beautifully printed on *large paper*—and then drank in plentiful satisfaction from the flattery of their friends; a second group not nearly so respectable who picked up a precarious living by writing for the journals, adapting their opinions to whatever was expected of them by the party paying for propaganda; and a third group, aboundingly hopeful at times and utterly depressed at others, who frequented the playhouses and pestered the managers with newborn plays, sure to hit the taste of the town if only the town were not defrauded once again by official stupidities.

Perhaps the categories should not be so clearly defined. Many young men of talent started with the first, passed through them all, and ended hopelessly in a debtor's gaol. Some more fortunate ones combined the three and just managed to keep the milk arrears from getting beyond all control. Gay himself during these years passed from one category to the next, never quite managing, or even, I think, hoping to maintain himself by writing alone. He was, apparently, by no means a pauper.[41]

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it were not easy to get much fuller information, than I am able to give, from Mr. *Budgell*, or Mr. *Pope;* to the first of whom, the beginning of his life was best known, and to the last, its afternoon and evening:—that poem, you speak of, call'd *Wine*, he printed in the year 1710, as I remember: I am sure, I have one, among my pamphlets; but they lie (like ideas in an unlogical head) so oppressively numerous, and obstructively mix'd, that to distinguish any one of them, out of the heap, is a task of more labour, than consequence. Yet, I will look for it, and send it to you, if 'twill be of use, or satisfaction, to any gentleman of your acquaintance. As to your question, whether Mr. *Gay* was ever a *domestic of the duchess of Monmouth*, I can answer it, in the affirmative: he was her *secretary*, about the year 1713, and continued so, 'till he went over to *Hanover*, in the beginning of the following year, with Lord *Clarendon*, who was sent thither by queen *Anne*. At his return, upon the *death* of that queen, all his hopes became *wither'd*, 'till Mr. *Pope*, (who, you know, is an excellent *planter*) reviv'd, and invigorated his *bays;* and indeed, very generously supported him, in some more *solid* improvements; for I remember a letter, wherein he invited him, to partake of his fortune, (at that time but a small one) assuring him, with a very *un-poetical* warmth, that, as long as himself had a *shilling*, Mr. *Gay* should be welcome to *Six-pence* of it; nay, to *Eight-pence*, if *he* could contrive but to live on a *groat*.—So much for Mr. *Gay*."

[41] *A General Dictionary* (1737), V, 406. "Our Author had a small fortune at his disposal, but far from sufficient to support him in that independent condition of

He moved about easily with men who had money, like Fortescue and Steele and Henry Cromwell. He put his name down for a copy of Hill's expensive *Ottoman Empire* in a subscription list that contained none but the titled and genteel. And when he came to publish his first poem, he was satisfied with nothing but the best and most costly format for that offspring of his maiden muse. His brother had but recently died, and possibly Jonathan's share of the family estate may have come to John Gay at this time and relieved him from too pressing needs for the moment. He seems to have been no literary hack but more accurately a young gentleman making experiments with literature, aware that he must keep his eyes wide open for some post that would provide money to gratify tastes that were growing increasingly expensive.

First, then, the poetry that appeared in these early years. Of it we know definitely only two items before Lintot's *Miscellany* was published in 1712, and these were *Wine*, printed by William Keble in 1708, and a few lines of eulogy prefaced to Dr. William Coward's *Licentia Poetica* in the following year. Gay thought neither of these worth reprinting when he collected his poems in 1720, and the chances are that many other verses equally unvalued in later years dropped from his pen at this time, some of which may have found their way into the journals. All his friends were doing it, and *The British Apollo* was there ready to print much worse poetry than his. Like the market-women, Gay and his friends brought their flowers of wit to the market, fearful lest, unsold that morning, they might die before night. Pope described their restless eagerness to print, and his own eagerness, in a letter he wrote about this time (May 7, 1709) to another of Gay's early friends, Henry Cromwell:

> Thus the same reason that furnishes Covent Garden with those nosegays you so delight in, supplies the Muses' Mercury, and British Apollo, not to say Jacob's Miscellanies, with verses. And it is the happiness of this age that the modern invention of printing poems for

life, to which the freedom of his spirit adapted his desires." This account of Gay was revised by Pope before publication.

pence a-piece has brought the nosegays of Parnassus to bear the same price; whereby the public-spirited Mr. Henry Hills, of Blackfriars, has been the cause of great ease and singular comfort to all the learned, who, never over-abounding in transitory coin, should not be discontented, methinks, even though poems were distributed gratis about the streets, like Bunyan's sermons and other pious treatises, usually published in a like volume and character.[42]

Pope's tone in this letter is rather nastily superior, based no doubt on the secured income which enabled him to cultivate his muse without worrying about the next dinner. Yet were one compelled to choose between the bowers of Windsor and the streets of London as the forcing-house for genius, surely London would be the better place. There poetry walked the streets undisguised and intelligible, or at least was criticized rabidly in the coffeehouses. Poets appeared at Will's and did not mind talking to strangers; they were not dimly discerned in some esoteric côterie. Addison's *Campaign* and Philips's *Cyder* were quoted and discussed over these tables, and although much of the talk must have been as vapid as Dick Easy's ecstasies over that "Ah!" (which he would rather have written than the whole *Aeneid*), it would at least suggest to a young aspirant that verse-making meant something in the life of the nation and that even he might learn how. True, such an audience would teach him to suppress his lyric fervors. One does not strip and exhibit the ultimate beauty on street corners or in taverns. That perhaps mattered little as ultimate beauty in poetry never seems to have worried anyone in the first decade of that century. So with one eye on Milton and the other on John Philips and the reflected beauty of burlesque, Gay published *Wine* in 1708, his first poem.[43]

These verses tell us at least two important facts about their author: first, that he has a sense for style and can recognize a mannerism when he sees one, and second, that his only chance for success or possible greatness lies in forsaking traditional

[42] Pope, *Works*, ed. Elwin and Courthope (1871), VI, 76.

[43] *Daily Courant*, May 22 and 25, 1708. "Just Publish'd, Wine, A Poem. Printed for Wm. Keble at the Black-spread-Eagle in Westminster-Hall."

elegance and presenting only those essentially commonplace human scenes, especially perhaps the life-stuff of the lowest classes, for whom, in spite of his aristocratic connections, Gay seems always to have had spontaneous sympathy. The main idea of the poem is an imitation of an imitation, and poets of that kind should—we can agree—be driven from the republic. Gay uses all the Miltonic tricks, the inverted word-order, the long parentheses, the use of adjectives for adverbs, the fondness for unusual words in *-ean* or *-ian*, the strings of proper names. It seems very much the schoolboy's clever exercise, but readers in those days apparently enjoyed detecting the parallels, and if like Dr. Johnson we condemn all imitative verse, out will certainly go many a fine eighteenth-century baby with this bath-water. Forgetting for the moment the intentional ponderosities of Gay's style, one can still find pleasure in his description of the British sailor and his great ship off through the trackless vast abyss to lofty Teneriffe, where the oaks are vine-clad, an early lotus-land:

> Sight most delicious, not an Irksom Thought,
> Or of left native *Isle*, or absent *Friends*,
> Or dearest *Wife*, or tender sucking *Babe*,
> His kindly treach'rous Mem'ry now presents;
> The Jovial *God* has left no room for Cares.

Gay had seen those great ships, the red-faced sailors and their wives and babes, and, when he thinks of them, the verse springs to life. Better still is his description of the crowd of roisterers ascending the stairs to the Devil Tavern, the stripling youth bounding up ahead to lead them into the presence of that majestic dame among the bottles. Toasts follow, and Gay has a chance—having learned the most important trick of his Grub Street friends—to pay prettily turned compliments to Marlborough, Devonshire, Godolphin, Sunderland, and Halifax.

It is worth noting that Gay had Keble print this poem in folio on beautiful paper, and was much annoyed when Henry Hills, a bookseller in Black-Friars, immediately issued a pirated

edition octavo on his usual "brown sheets and scurvy letter," and repeated the injury once again the next year.[44] The poem must have excited some interest. After all, the attention of this unprincipled publisher was a compliment to the young poet, and the printing of two cheap editions following closely on the heels of the authorized one meant that others besides the immediate friends and patrons of the author were reading the poem.

The other bit of versifying from this period that we know to be Gay's is the little poem of flattery inscribed to Dr. Coward. Now Dr. Coward was one of the group of gentlemen whom Hill had got together to handle *The British Apollo*, a man who was notorious already for his pamphlets on immortality but who prided himself even more on his patronage of poetry. He had proved his competence as a Latinist back in 1682, when he translated *Absalom and Achitophel* into that language, though, in the favor of the learned, his version was later displaced by Atterbury's. Was he not also the author of a considerable epic stretching its dreary length Blackmore-fashion over three hundred and twenty-six pages and called by the inviting title of *Abramideis, or the Faithful Patriarch Exemplified in the Lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph: an heroic poem* (1705)? Later he developed a propensity for criticism, and while engaged casually with the gentlemen of the *Apollo* he was wholeheartedly busy on his new art of criticism, *Licentia Poetica discuss'd: or, the True Test of Poetry. Without which It is Difficult to Judge of, or Compose, A Correct English Poem. To which are added, Critical Observations On the Principal, Antient and Modern Poets. viz. Homer, Horace, Virgil, Milton,*

[44] John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century* (1812), VIII, 168 n. "Henry Hills, a notorious Printer in Black Fryars; who regularly pirated every good Poem or Sermon that was published; a circumstance which led to the direction in the Act of 8 Anne, that *fine paper copies* should be presented to the Public Libraries." Plomer tells us (*Dictionary of Booksellers and Printers*, 1907, p. 155) that Henry Hills died in 1713, and an advertisement appeared in the *Evening Post* of Nov. 12 to the effect that his stock "consisting of the most eminent Sermons, Poems, Plays, &c., is now to be disposed of, at the Blue Anchor, Paternoster Row. N.B. There can never be any of the same, or any in the like manner, reprinted after these are gone, there being an Act of Parliament to the contrary."

Waller, Cowley, Dryden, &c. as frequently liable to Just Censure. A Poem (1709).

This book was warmly pushed by Dr. Coward's friends on the *Apollo*. Hill and Gay wrote verses in praise of it. It was advertised profusely, and questions to draw attention to it were naïvely inserted in the midst of the ordinary reading matter.

> Q. What Book wou'd you advise me to buy, to give me a true Taste in Poetry?
>
> A. Dr. Coward's *Licentia Poetica* by all means.

And Coward attempted a return for this back-scratching in his preface: "The most variety of *Lyrick Forms*, Bad and Good, I find in a Paper lately Publish'd, call'd the *British Apollo*, by some *Ingenious* Gentlemen, who worthily testifie Themselves to deserve the Character."

Coward's critical praise and blame are distributed quite as one would expect. Peterborough, Hill's friend and one of *Apollo's* noble patrons, he praises extravagantly. Blackmore's *Prince Arthur* he likes, and Creech's translation of Lucretius, though he damns his Horace, as all the critics did. Garth, that best good-natured man, a Christian though he knows it not, the author of *The Dispensary*, receives rather more than his due meed of praise. Dryden and Milton are his heroes, "if we *Blank Lines* True Poetry can call." He praises Butler, Cotton, and Oldham though he dislikes the roughness of Oldham's style. He deprecates realism in the pastoral, disapproves in general of irregularity, whether he finds it in Spenser's Alexandrines or in unpretentious lyric. In general, he preaches to Gay and the rest of his readers much the same critical doctrine that Gay and Pope both heard from Henry Cromwell, their "Sir Timothy Tittle," and that emerges with most clarity perhaps in the letters between Pope and Walsh, dated a year or so earlier than Coward's poem.

Knowing Gay's frivolous humor and his willingness at all times to flatter with his tongue in his cheek, one can hardly take too seriously his commendatory verses to Coward. Some of the best of the verses in *The British Apollo* were probably Gay's,

but one cannot help noticing that, whereas Hill carefully gleaned all his little poems for future collected editions, Gay quite properly let the mists of oblivion cover what he had contributed. Can we imagine that one who knew so well the meaning of a long apprenticeship whether in silks or in versifying could so frivolously regard the steeps of Parnassus? Dr. Coward was, I fear, the one who was frivolous in his eyes, not poetry.

> The Vulgar Notion of Poetic fire
> Is, *that laborious Art can ne'er aspire,*
> *Nor Constant Studies the bright Bays acquire.*
> *And that high Flights the unborn Bard receives,*
> *And only Nature the due Laurel gives;*
> But *You,* with innate shining Flames endow'd,
> To wide *Castalian* Springs point out the *God.*
> Thro' *your Perspective* we can plainly see,
> The *New Discover'd* Road of Poetry,
> To steep *Parnassus* you direct the way
> So smooth, that vent'rous Travellers cannot stray,
> But with unerring steps, rough ways disdain,
> And by *you* led, the beauteous *Summit* gain,
> Where polish'd Lays shall raise their *growing* Fames,
> And with their *tuneful Guide,* enrol their *Honour'd Names.*[45]

Gay slips in an Alexandrine at the end as if to assure us that his eye is on a better model than Coward!

The next poem that we know definitely to be Gay's was the one called clumsily *On a Miscellany of Poems to Bernard Lintott,* written in October, 1711, or earlier, though not published until the following year. By that time Gay had managed to add to the list of his friends some who would be able in future years to be of more use to him far than Aaron Hill or the egregious Dr. Coward, and it may be well to pause before considering this next poem to rehearse the story of Gay's friendships in 1711-1712, especially as the poem is itself a series of compliments and in a sense a record of new social contacts.

The two friends who meant most to Gay in these early days

[45] *The Poetical Works of John Gay,* p. 210.

were Eustace Budgell and Alexander Pope, Budgell for the present and Pope for the future. Budgell was the cousin and intimate friend of Addison, who found a place for this attractive, if somewhat headstrong, youth soon after his arrival in London and even shared his lodgings with him in the later years of Queen Anne's reign. But Gay's acquaintance with Budgell would scarcely come through Addison. There was a much more natural and casual chance for contact, and that was through William Fortescue, Gay's Devonshire friend. This Fortescue, from a famous family, was the son of Henry Fortescue of Buckland-Filleigh; he came into his fortune at the ripe age of four, and presently at a somewhat riper age increased his fortune by marriage with a distant kinswoman. William Fortescue liked London, came up early, and through Gay met many of the *Apollo* friends.[46] After his wife's death in 1710, he settled in the city for good as a student in the Middle Temple, progressed in the law, and finally in 1741 became Master of the Rolls and member of the Privy Council.

Fortescue's widowed mother, formerly Agnes Dennis, a cousin of Gay's, had early married the Reverend Gilbert Budgell, D.D., of St. Thomas, near Exeter, himself a widower and the father of Eustace. Under these circumstances it was inevitable that son and stepson should meet frequently, and, since they both arrived in town at approximately the same time, both strangers and both members of the Inns of Court, one may assume with some confidence at least a limited amount of social give-and-take between them. Gay would come to see his old school-friend, Fortescue, and there he would meet Budgell. With Budgell as a friend he would certainly have opportunities to become acquainted with Addison. Hill's mention of Budgell along with Pope as one of Gay's early friends is assurance, I think, that these young men were intimate. If it were not, the frivolous introduction of Budgell's name in one of Gay's earliest letters to Fortescue (October 5, 1713) would confirm the notion that these three were about together a good deal and had few secrets from one another. "Budgell," says Gay, "is still of the

[46] He subscribed for Hill's *Ottoman Empire*.

same opinion when I saw him which is about a month since that all the Ladies are rascals."

The introduction to Pope came through Henry Cromwell, a well-known habitué of Will's coffeehouse, "honest, hatless Cromwell, with red breeches," as Gay calls him in *Mr. Pope's Welcome from Greece*. He was one of those lesser men about town, of independent means, who perhaps serve their day and generation well enough by bringing more famous men together, and may even provide copy for caricature in such papers as *The Tatler;* for Cromwell had suffered at least three times from the ridicule of its pages. His mistress, Mrs. Elizabeth Thomas, Dryden's *Corinna*, a rather pathetic figure among the minor poets of the early century, remarks somewhere, "I cannot chuse but be pleased with the Conquest of a Person whose *Fame* our incomparable *Tatler* has rendered immortal, by the *Three* distinguishing Titles of 'Squire Easy the *amorous* Bard; Sir Timothy the *Critick;* and Sir Taffety Trippet the *Fortune-Hunter*."[47] "He was not only a pretty gentleman, but also a pretty poet," says Steele derisively. This was, however, the man whom Pope as a youth visited in London and on whom he chose to practice the art of fine letter-writing.

Pope's first letter to Cromwell is a rhyming epistle, not too respectable, but interesting from the light it throws on some of these early friendships. The correspondence proper starts on April 25, 1708, and continues down to December 21, 1711. Gay's name does not appear until July of that last year. The first mention is but a casual greeting; the second suggests growing intimacy since Pope is trying to find a publisher for one of Gay's pamphlets. Evidently, Gay felt by this time that he knew Pope well enough to ask his help in matters of this sort. Gay and Pope would very soon be busy helping Lintot in the preparation of his *Miscellany*, and the beginning of that association can be traced in these Cromwell letters. Cromwell wrote to Pope on October 26, 1711: "I arrived on Saturday last much wearied, yet had wrote sooner, but was told by Mr. Gay (who

[47] *Pylades and Corinna* (1732), I, 96 and 194. Cf. also *The Tatler*, Nos. 47, 49, and 165.

has writ a pretty poem to Lintot, and who gives you his service) that you was gone from home."[48]

Pope expressed rather more than polite interest in these verses in his next letter, and when a copy of them finally arrived with its pleasant compliment to himself, he returned (December 21, 1711) his warm acknowledgments:

I would willingly return Mr. Gay my thanks for the favour of his poem, and in particular for his kind mention of me. I hoped, when I heard a new comedy had met with success upon the stage, that it had been his, to which I really wish no less; and, had it been any way in my power, should have been very glad to have contributed to its introduction into the world.[49]

By this time the friendship of Pope and Gay is established; they need Cromwell no more.

This last quotation from Pope's letter shows us that Gay's literary aspirations were rising well above the horizons of petty journals. His verses to Lintot were not printed until 1712, and his first play, *The Mohocks,* written that year, was never acted; but the young man was beginning to suffer the serious pangs of authorship, and fortunately there was a publisher at hand ready to humor him. Bernard Lintot was at this time rising from humble beginnings to be a serious rival of Jacob Tonson as purveyor of poetry. Back in 1705, John Dunton had given him scurvy notice:

He lately publish'd *A Collection of Tragick Tales*, &c. by which I perceive he is angry with the World, and scorns it into the Bargain; and I can't blame him, for *D'Urfey* (his Author) both Treats and Esteems it, as it deserves, too hard a Task for those whom it *Flatters;* or perhaps for *Bernard* himself, shou'd the World ever change its Humour, and *Grin* upon him; however, to do Mr. *Lintot* Justice, he is *a Man of very good Principles*, and, I dare ingage, will never want an Author of *Solfa,* so long as the *Play-House* will encourage his *Comedies*.[50]

By 1712, the world had changed its humor and was about to grin on Lintot. Rowe, Parnell, Pope, and Gay were beginning to establish a new literary clique, and their choice for pub-

[48] Pope, *Works*, VI, 125. [49] *Ibid.*, VI, 130.
[50] *The Life and Errors of John Dunton* . . . (1818), I, 314.

lisher fell on Lintot. His *Miscellaneous Poems and Translations* was a very real success, and the 1712 issue was followed by further and somewhat enlarged editions in 1714, 1720, and 1722. Gay contributed the verses *On a Miscellany of Poems to Bernard Lintott,* above mentioned, and a translation of the story of *Arachne* from the sixth book of the *Metamorphoses.* Pope's *Rape of the Lock* appeared there in its first form not yet "machined." Pope added two adaptations of Chaucer supposedly by Betterton; Cromwell offered two translations from Ovid, while Edmund Smith appeared on its pages with his *Poem to the Memory of Mr. John Philips.* By 1720, Gay had three more poems which he was willing to add, the *Epistle to Burlington,* the *Epistle to a Lady,* and *Sweet William's Farewell,* while Pope threw in the *Verses Design'd to be Prefix'd to Mr. Lintott's Miscellany,* and the arrangement of the *Miscellany* poems was then altered so as to draw all Gay's poems together and to put the two poems in compliment to Lintot side by side. As the Cromwell letters show, Pope's *Verses* to Lintot were written in response to Gay's suggestion. Why anyone should have doubted the authorship of either of these poems is inexplicable, but apparently a mistake by Nichols can set the whole world guessing.[51] Gay's lines are prettily turned. He expatiates on variety as the special charm of the miscellany volume, exhibits his own taste in poetry, and picks out for pleasant compliment his friends among contemporary poets, Sheffield, Congreve, Prior, Granville, but particularly Addison, Garth, and the new-risen genius Pope.

> When *Pope's* harmonious muse with pleasure roves,
> Amidst the plains, the murm'ring streams, and groves,
> Attentive Eccho pleas'd to hear his songs,
> Thro' the glad shade each warbling note prolongs;
> His various numbers charm our ravish'd ears,
> His steady judgment far out-shoots his years,
> And early in the youth the God appears.

In this volume, Gay and Cromwell are the precursors, heralds of that vast army of Ovidian enthusiasts which soon was to ap-

[51] Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes,* VIII, 164-168.

pear flaunting its colors so bravely in Garth's magnificent folio (1717). By that time the fad was rampant. The list of translators in Garth omits hardly an important name among the literary men of this period.[52] "About this time," says Warton, "it became fashionable among the wits at Button's, the mob of gentlemen that wrote with ease, to translate Ovid. Their united performances were published in form by Garth, with a preface written in a flowery and lively style, but full of strange opinions."[53] For some reason, Gay's name became very closely associated with Ovid's throughout the century. He had a knack for turning off those mythical stories, which does not please us specially, but which evidently captivated the hearts of eighteenth-century readers. That particular episodic turn of his mind appears in many other poems more pretentious than these bits from Ovid, and down through the century when later writers seek to compliment the shades of Gay they frequently recall his "sweet *Ovidian* strains."[54]

IV

So much then for Gay's early attempts at poetry. The poems of the kind which he wrote in these years were after all scarcely a serious occupation, even for pretty gentlemen who expected nothing but a few guineas for the compliments, or in more hopeful moods actual introductions to those they flattered, introductions that might lead to more substantial patronage.

Verse was yielding in the first decade of the eighteenth century to her humbler rival prose, and when Gay was introduced by Hill to the young gentlemen who answered questions and wrote bright essays in the columns of *The British Apollo* he

[52] The list follows: Dryden, Addison, Eusden, Maynwaring, Croxall, Tate, Stonestreet, Vernon, Gay, Pope, Hervey, Congreve, Ozell, Stanyan, Catcott, Rowe, Garth, and Welsted. Garth's *Ovid* with Gay's translations from the ninth book rolls along through the century with editions (usually in two volumes) appearing in 1720, 1727, 1736, 1751, 1794, 1807, 1818. Pope and Gay also collaborated in a translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, edited by Dr. George Sewell and competing somewhat unsuccessfully with Garth. There were editions of the Sewell *Ovid* in 1717, 1724, 1733, 1742. Obviously Ovid was a strong card in the eighteenth-century poetic game. Notice correspondence on this subject in *Times Literary Supplement*, May 21, 1931.

[53] Joseph Warton, *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope* (1806), II, 25 n.

[54] See "The Poet's Complaint to Poverty," in Ewan Clark's *Miscellaneous Poems* (1779), pp. 10-12.

would certainly not overlook the possibility of turning a penny or adding to his reputation by cultivating that medium. We have already noted Gay's verses to Dr. Coward, who wrote spasmodically for the *Apollo*. How close his contacts were with the rest of the group or how much he actually contributed to the journal it is now impossible to discover since he never reprinted any of this work. Only six years after the decease of the *Apollo* he was spoken of casually as one of those associated with Hill in running the paper, and the chances are that he did his full share of the work of preparing for public consumption this very curious and very entertaining sheet.

His associates were for the most part a humble lot, not the kind one brags about later when fame has come one's way and famous men are at one's elbow. After all, Pope did not talk much about Henry Cromwell after 1712, and one can scarcely blame Gay for neglecting Marshall Smith and the Apollonian nonentities when Swift and Lord Oxford were listening to his jokes. These Apollonians were, though, the young men who listened to his jokes in 1708-1709, and they were the ones who doubtless gave him many a hint to help him towards success in this journalistic game.

The British Apollo was Hill's first big business venture, but the idea was not a new one. Back in 1691 John Dunton and three of his friends, including the Reverend Samuel Wesley, father of the evangelist, had sought to catch public attention in a question-and-answer journal called *The Athenian Gazette*, a title changed presently to *The Athenian Mercury*. This was reasonably successful for some half-dozen years. Even Sir William Temple and Lord Halifax did not disdain to offer an occasional contribution to its pages. Swift—a country gentleman, Dunton called him—sent in "an ingenious poem" in which he celebrated the virtues of these unknown arbiters of wit with a fantastic extravagance which must later have been embarrassing.

> Pardon, ye great Unknown, and far-exalted Men,
> The wild Excursions of a youthful Pen . . .
> Look where exalted Virtue and Religion sit,
> Enthron'd with Heav'nly Wit!

> Look where you see
> The greatest Scorn of learned Vanity . . .
> And when you find out these, believe true Fame is there,
> Far above all Reward, yet to whom all is due:
> And this, Ye great Unknown! is only known in you.

The public gradually lost interest in Dunton's project, and for ten long years there was no court of authority in which one could air his puzzled queries, or exhibit his bleeding heart, or exercise his ambling Pegasus. Not before Dunton and Defoe, but certainly before Addison and Steele, Hill noted that the public were beginning to look for more than politics and news in their journals. He was aware of the eagerness with which the coffee-house audience awaited the *Memoirs of the Scandal Club*, and was possibly surprised to find more than a casual interest taken in the verses which John Oldmixon scattered abroad in his *Muses Mercury*. He felt that variety in journalism was the secret of success, and when, in February, 1708, he was ready to start his own paper, he selected his Society of Gentlemen, his representatives of Apollo, with care. Religion and poetry, the fine arts and medicine, science generally and mathematics in particular, town-life and domestic problems, all these and more must have attention, for was not the epigraph chosen sufficiently inclusive?—

> By me what shall be, what has been, and what is, is disclosed; through me songs are sung to the accompaniment of the lute. The healing art is my discovery, and throughout the world I am honoured as the bearer of help, and the properties of simples are subjected to me.

The staff finally selected to carry on this high task preserved its anonymity with astonishing success. Occasionally the advertisements give a clue, since they usually celebrate the literary and professional merits of the gentlemen immediately concerned. Contemporary readers wanted to know more of this mysterious Society of Gentlemen, but got little satisfaction when they took the trouble to send in questions on that subject. "It must suffice to say that the Number of the Society is large

enough, and all of them of sufficient Age, to answer far more pertinent Questions than Yours."

The routine work of the journal was done by Marshall Smith, another friend of Hill's. He was more largely responsible for the continued existence of *The British Apollo* than anyone else, and hopefully carried on the task to the end of the third year, long after Hill and Gay had lost interest. He and Hill and a certain P—n P(urce)ll, as we shall see, bore the brunt of Dunton's resentments, when the old publisher, who had earlier browbeaten Tom Brown into respect for his literary preserves, attempted the same crude methods on these young men of *The British Apollo.* Dunton's angry maledictions in his *Athenianism* let us into the secret of Smith's gay waistcoats at least, his snobbishness about money and social position, and his frivolous lack of interest in all the improving elements in his paper. The bright waistcoats were soon—within six years—to be soiled in the Queen's Bench Prison, and his aristocratic friends were to be exchanged for companions of the Mint, as he attempted to raise money to extricate himself by seeking subscriptions for his dreary *Monitors*—collections of religious verses—and starting a new question-and-answer journal, *The Oracle,* new alas only in name, for in dull discouragement he copied the same old *Apollo* questions and the same old answers.[55] His verses by way of dialogue written along with Hill appear properly accredited to him in Savage's *Miscellany* in 1726,[56] and once again in Hill's collected *Works* in 1753, this

[55] *The Daily Oracle. By which all Questions are Answer'd in every Art and Science, either Serious, Comical, or Humorous, both in Prose and Poetry, with other Amusements.* By a Society of Gentlemen. The first number was issued on Aug. 1, 1715. The *Proposals* announce: "Whereas *M. Smith,* Gent. has had an extraordinary Success on the Presenting his Poems call'd the Monitors, insomuch that above Twelve Hundred of the best Families in *England* have made him Generous Returns, and also have Encourag'd him to Publish a Weekly Paper of such *Kind,* as may both Improve and Delight; and the rather because formerly He was the *Undertaker* of the Paper call'd the *British Apollo.* . .

"No Papers will be Sold to any but the Subscribers. . . . We shall take the same Method in the Order of the Questions, as was observ'd in the *British Apollo;* viz. Of inserting the Divinity Questions in the first place, then those in Philosophy, &c. but never cumber the Paper with News, as in that, there being a sufficient Number *of Prints of that Nature* already."

[56] He was Damon to Hill's Philemon in a *Dialogue concerning Riches and Poverty.*

time without his name. He was a driveling versifier, had practiced odes and such-like effusions as early as the death of King William, and later—on occasions fit and unfit—had written verses unmatched for nervelessness and inanity in that most unashamed age. His verses in praise of Hill may stand as a sample of his verbal and intellectual capacity. They were printed by Mayo in the second edition of *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (1710).

Thou only has attempted such a Style,
Where Flow'rs of Eloquence and tuneful Strains
Of Flowing Numbers ease our Pains,
And Sliding Hours beguile;
Thou, whose fresh Youth, with sense of Years, is Crown'd,
And in whose early Spring such Ripe Autumnal Fruits are found.[57]

Marshall Smith was doubtless responsible for most of the versified lucubrations in *The British Apollo,* in which the questions and answers are sometimes themselves metrified, and the occasional obscenities alone do not serve to lighten the darkness visible of his stupidity. He considered himself qualified to answer questions on painting on the strength of a book he had published on *The Art of Painting* back in 1692, and took pains to remind readers, when opportunity arose, of this forgotten manual.

Q. Who was the best author that ever treated of painting?

A. Signior Paulinus, an Italian, writ the best treatise on that art which hath come to our knowledge, but 'tis a very scarce book. In English a gentleman of our Society writ one some years since. All we can say of it is that had he seen one before it in English, which discovered that the author so well understood the art, he had not writ his.

This interest was no doubt a very minor part of his activities on the journal. He was, if not at the very beginning, very soon

[57] The magnificently blasphemous simile in *A Pindarique Poem. Sacred to the Glorious Memory of King William III* further exemplifies Smith's flowers of eloquence:

As when the Saviour of Mankind came down,
From the bright Regions of Eternal Day,
And left his dazling Throne and Radiant Crown,
Necessities of Human Life t'obey . . .

the general editor and turned his wits to any problem that the others neglected, or manufactured fresh problems and solutions when blank spaces had to be filled, or advertisers had to be pleased.[58] Dunton accused him of complete lack of principles.

I han't Room here to make a *Pass* at that dull, ignorant, false and impertinent Scribler, M. *Smith*, that has been long aping and lessening the Credit of my *Question-Project* by his weak and ridiculous Answers, and yet has the Impudence and Folly to stile himself the *British Apollo*. . . . Then know, Sir Fop (for en't your gawdy Waistcoat a Jest to such as think you—*a poor, craz'd, paltry Author?*) that scribling is the Air I breath in . . . and therefore, *Smith*, as your Office is *Slander* and *interloping*, you shall be well lash'd with the Rods of Truth and Honesty, and I'll never jerk you with any other . . . you are a proud, whimsical, silly, blundering, conceited Fop, a *British* Jest, a walking Farce; for you told me in one Letter, "Were it not more for Reputation's sake, because you wou'd not be look'd on as the Author of light Matters alone, you wou'd not insert another noble Subject, for (adds our pious and grave Casuist) Farce rides triumphant."[59]

Farce did not ride so triumphant, apparently, as Smith thought. It was the variety of its offerings that kept *The British Apollo* and its young men of brightest parts comfortably afloat for more than three years, and it was probably not so much Smith's wretched verses or puerile joking, nor even Hill's pleasant disquisitions on the thrills of travel, on cochineal *berries* in Tenedos, or on the intrepidity of birds flying over the Dead Sea, folk superstition all to the contrary, that kept the journal going, as the attempt made by its writers to satisfy the public curiosity on theological controversy and its corollary natural science. Slowly and perhaps a trifle grotesquely, the Londoner, now somewhat forgetful of his traditional gods, was sinking to his knees before science, and, since natural explanations must supplant the will of God, in poured questions to *The British Apollo* on miracles, on the blackness of Negroes, on Messianic prophecy, on swan songs, on waterspouts, on the virtues of tobacco, on

[58] The second edition of *The British Apollo* (one volume only appeared) was issued by Marshall Smith in 1711.

[59] *Athenian News: or Dunton's Oracle*, March 7-11, March 11-14, 1710.

immortality, on apparitions, on the spleen and many other weird complaints, on monstrosities, even on the derivations of words, for surely now that God and immortality, as well as swan songs, are debatable, only the Royal Society can settle it, unless by chance *The British Apollo* happens to know.

The British Apollo did know a surprising number of supposed facts. Since Marshall Smith and Hill and Gay were not equal to all the questions, they called in specially qualified men to assist. The man who answered most questions on natural science and divinity in the first two years of the *Apollo* was Dr. James Mauclerc, son of a Huguenot doctor from Montpellier admitted to the College of Physicians *in forma pauperis* in 1689. He combined his professional equipment of knowledge in physiology, anatomy, and medicine with an interest apparently sincere in the support of orthodox divinity. His copy of the first two volumes of *The British Apollo* may be found in the Harvard College Library with marginalia showing that he answered some seventy or more questions in each of those first two volumes. In later debates on *Abridging the Study of Physick* he seems to have been ranked with Dr. Josiah Woodward among the "Antacademic Philosophers, the generous Despisers of the Schools, and the rest of the numerous Sect of Inspired Physicians." His last appearance before the reading public, when he was one of the oldest members of the Royal College of Physicians, was as the compiler along with Richardson, of *The Christian Magazine, or Treasure. Containing, A Choice Collection of many Remarkable Passages Upon Several Important Religious Subjects, Taken out of the Writings of Some of the Most Eminent Modern Divines: Tending to Our Confirmation Both in the Belief and Practice of the True Christian Religion, against Atheists, Deists, Socinians, Papists, And other Corrupt and Loose Christians* (1748).[60]

But Dr. Mauclerc's ponderosities on natural philosophy and divinity lacked the spice of heresy, and to add this leaven to the Apollonian lump the singularly unpromising aid of Dr. William Coward was called in. Dr. Coward's qualifications were at least

[60] Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes*, IV, 597.

threefold, medical, religious, and poetical. Book after book of his on disease had appeared—on the treatment of smallpox, scurvy, gout, and consumption, on the proper care of the eyes, on the ferruginous-waters at Ipswich-Spa and their medicinal uses—but it was not until 1702 that his fame was established by the publication of a book which had nothing to do with his trade and may perhaps have ruined it. Charles Leslie, the writer of *The Rehearsal*, tells us that "the Dr. was so Big with his new Vamp'd Monster, that he neglected his Practice to Promote it."[61] And the Monster, all properly groomed, that is, proof-read and corrected by Sir Hans Sloane, was *Second Thoughts Concerning Human Soul, Demonstrating the Notion of Human Soul, As believ'd to be a Spiritual Immortal Substance, united to Human Body, To be a Plain Heathenish Invention, And not Consonant to the Principles of Philosophy, Reason, or Religion.* Mrs. Behn's principle that faith is the poor retreat of routed argument was no doubt invoked by both sides in the controversy that immediately followed the publication of this book. And on one side not only faith but fire was appealed to, for Coward's books were burned by the common hangman and he himself was treated along with Toland, Collins, Asgill, and the others to the usual discourtesies reserved for heretics by the faithful, including this time so notable a defender as Swift. *Farther Thoughts* followed—attack and defence in the approved manner of the theological squabbler. Coward was himself a rather muddled-headed, well-meaning old gentleman, scarcely knew what he had meant to say, and appeared rather surprised at the mare's nest he had started. His ideas were old by at least half a century, as the author of the *Lady's Pacquet of Letters* knew, for she mentions Coward's book and comments tartly on his lack of originality.

> I have also sent you Dr. *Coward's* farther Thoughts upon the human Soul, with Dr. *Taylor's*, and Mr. *Broughton's* Answer to his *Second Thoughts*. The first appears to me to have done most justice

[61] *A Serpent and no Sting: or; a Combat between The Rehearser's Country-Man and Dr. Coward's Welch-Man; wherein Hur is Stript Stark Naked, and Expos'd to Shame* (1707), p. 7.

to the Argument. The Doctor's Notion seems to insinuate the entire Mortality, under pretence of the Soul's sleeping till the grand Resurrection. 'Tis however certain, that this Doctrine is much older than himself. I have seen a small Treatise, Printed in the Year 1650, call'd, *Man wholly Mortal;* from whence he seems to have transcrib'd his strongest Arguments.[62]

The subject, as we know, plagues humanity at all times, and the readers of *The British Apollo* would not let it rest. Coward was behind the scenes with many a long paragraph. We know this from *The Female Tatler* (No. 30), which identifies most succinctly one of the editors of *The British Apollo* as "*Dr. Pusillanimous* who upon *Second Thoughts* is set up for a great Scruple-salver as well as Oculist."

One would like to add a greater name to this list of writers on the *Apollo*, but in spite of Mr. G. W. Niven's interesting suggestions the connection of Arbuthnot with its pages remains possible, but not provable.[63] Arbuthnot loved pamphleteering and cared little what happened to his work after it left his hands. Everyone knows what a tower of strength he was to the Harley-St. John-Swift organization in the last years of Anne's reign. As early, however, as 1692, he was busy translating Huygens's *Of the Laws of Chance*,[64] and in 1701 he published *An Essay on the Usefulness of Mathematical Learning*, both of which subjects appeared with insistent regularity in the pages of *The British Apollo.* The first topic—deciding wagers at cards—seemed to have caught the coffeehouse imagination so thoroughly that Gay, when he commented on the fast declining *Apollo* in 1711, mentioned this service and giving good advice to shopkeepers and their apprentices as its main business. The

[62] *Memoirs of the Court of England. In Two Parts.* By the Countess of *Dunois.* . . . Now made English to which is added *The Lady's Pacquet of Letters* (1707), p. 571. Some of these *Letters* were written by Mrs. Manley. See Mr. Paul Bunyan Anderson's Harvard thesis on that lady's career.

[63] *Selections from The British Apollo* . . ., ed. the late G. W. Niven (Paisley, 1903).

[64] This was read widely. The fourth edition, revised by John Ham, appeared in 1738. *Of the Laws of Chance, or, a Method of Calculation of the Hazards of Game, Plainly demonstrated, And applied to Games at present most in Use; Which may be easily extended to the most intricate Cases of Chance imaginable.*

most interesting question to be raised is whether Arbuthnot may not have contributed the answers to those questions about the famous Hungarian twins, questions which remind us strongly of his treatment of similar problems in Chapters XIV and XV of the *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus,* the "Process at Law upon the Marriage of Scriblerus and the Pleadings of the Advocates."[65] These twins, whose bodies were joined together Siamese fashion, appeared in London in the summer of 1708 and were exhibited to a curious public at a house in the Strand. They were, so Nichols tells us, well shaped, had beautiful faces, loved each other, could read, write, and sing, spoke Hungarian, High and Low Dutch, French, and English.[66] Their later history to the time of their death at St. Petersburg in 1723 is recorded by Carl Rayger, surgeon in the convent where they died, and his story appears in *The Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* for the year 1757.[67] Their arrival in London was the signal for a barrage of questions in *The British Apollo.*[68] At least seven questions arrived in the first batch, some anatomical, some religious and moral, some legalistic, and all were answered with high seriousness. Proper scientific authorities were suggested, and there was even some trace of human sympathy for these strange creatures, the sport of nature or of the gods. There can be no question, it seems to me, that Arbuthnot had this case in mind in his later account of Martin's marriage. There he gives all these problems a facetious turn, since his purpose was to ridicule pedantry and the circumlocutions of legal practice. But whether or not he wrote *Apollo*'s serious replies to the questions of puzzled Londoners in 1708 is and must remain doubtful.

We learn from a letter of Marshall Smith's to Dunton, January 18, 1710, that during the first year and a half of *The British Apollo* eight gentlemen were concerned in it and that by the time of writing he had completed the buying-off process and was alone responsible.

[65] Omitted by all editors since Warburton, except Bowles.
[66] *The Tatler,* ed. John Nichols (1786), III, 411.
[67] Vol. L, part 1, p. 311. [68] Nos. 35, 36, 37.

I consider'd that the Charge of a whole Sheet and fine Paper, wou'd render the Profit divided not worth the while for Eight Gentlemen to be concern'd about it, therefore I have for some Time bought off the Interest of everyone concern'd with me.[69]

We have now accounted for five or six of the *Apollo* group; the remaining two or three must remain nebulous—certainly no one can suppose that matters much. Nichols seems to think that Roger Grant, the oculist, was one of the group. "The operator, Mr. *Roger* Grant, a pains-taking man in his way, seems to have been a writer in the 'British Apollo,' where his advertisements and his praises occur *passim*."[70]

If he had been one of the original undertakers, he would certainly have been perfectly willing to withdraw from the *Apollo* in 1710, as his reputation was made by that time and he was soon (September 27, 1710) to be completely established as oculist and operator-in-extraordinary to Queen Anne. That "arrival" about the person of the Queen had been partly due to his Tory principles and partly no doubt to the scandalous but successful way in which he advertised himself and his powers. He made the most of a successful or partially successful operation which he had performed on the eyes of a blind boy in Newington on June 19, 1709. The whole town was interested. Not only *The British Apollo* but *The Tatler* commented on his success. Steele dressed up the story with a plentiful gravy of pathos, introduced a sympathetic girl friend to lead the boy gently along this avenue of a newly discovered sense, and incidentally gave Grant a boost the impetus of which was not exhausted till the latter's appointment as oculist-in-ordinary to George I in July, 1715.[71] Unfortunately, some ironic spirit—no friend of Grant's—published at the critical moment an amusing pamphlet which disturbs our faith rather more than it did that of Grant's contemporaries and possible patients. This unknown writer goes into shocking details about the great doctor's

[69] *Athenian News: or Dunton's Oracle*, March 21-25, 1710.

[70] *The Tatler*, ed. Nichols (1786), II, 217.

[71] Interest in the case lasted down to a late *Spectator* (No. 472), in which a correspondent concludes that the boy had actually been helped and many other blind persons cured.

lack of any high standard of veracity in advertisement, suggests indelicately such matters as forgery in the documents produced, and finally concludes that Grant deserves credit for helping the boy, even though the boy had never been totally blind, and even though after the operation his sight was still seriously defective.

> And the Cure is the more Wonderful, if we consider that the said *Roger Grant* is an Illiterate and Unlearned Man, and had the Disadvantage to be bred up in the mean Profession of a Cobler, as most Authors agree, tho' some say a Tinker.
>
> But besides this Gift of Curing, to give him his Due, he has another as extraordinary, of Preaching. . . . This Evangelical Doctor, treading in the Steps of St. Luke, who was both an Evangelist and a Physician, doth Wonders, both in his Cures, and in Converting Unbelievers. And 'tis by all acknowledg'd, that he has made as great a Proficiency in Physick, as in Divinity. . . .
>
> Nothing is now wanting to perfect the Cure of *William Jones*, but only a little Eye-Water. And this Defect may easily be supply'd by his submitting to be Duck'd in the *Anabaptist's* Dipping-place, the Waters of which have an *Enlightning* Virtue, and will so effectually clear his Sight, that (by another Miracle) in five Minutes more, *William Jones* will be able to Read and Write as well as the great *Oculist* that Couch'd him.[72]

Fluttering about on the edges of *The British Apollo*, no doubt on the most friendly terms with those who took a more active part in the actual writing, were numbers of others, many of whom naturally need a resurrection-man to dig them up—like some of those already mentioned—and when dug up look scarcely more attractive than what the resurrection-man got. There was Thomas Howard, the author of *Roman Stories: or, the History of the Seven Wise Mistresses of Rome*, a best-seller which had run into twenty-five editions by 1754 and was to run into as many more before the end of the century. Along with Robert Talbot and some unknown ladies of Hill's circle, he wrote commendatory verses which were prefixed to the *Apollo*

[72] *A Full and True Account of a Miraculous Cure, of a Young Man in Newington, That was Born Blind, And was in Five Minutes brought to Perfect Sight. By Mr. Roger Grant Oculist* (1709), pp. 13-15.

as an introduction to the world. Turner was always about, for he set the music for *The British Apollo,* along with Ford of Kensington, who could cure stammering, more doctors, William Carter and William Crosse, mere advertisers, it may be. Even James Salter, the "accumulative virtuoso" whose museum at Chelsea was so popular, contributed verses. Occasional poems appear by Nahum Tate, the poet laureate, who was associated with Aaron Hill as early as May, 1708, in translating *The Celebrated Speeches of Ajax and Ulysses,* from Book XIII of Ovid's *Metamorphoses.* Tate's long career of industry misapplied was drawing towards an ignominious end. He had doctored Shakespeare, reset the Psalms, and written one poem, *Panacea: a Poem on Tea,* which according to Pope was the only original in all his poor page. Now his last days were to be sicklied o'er by association with Marshall Smith, certainly the dullest of all *Apollo*'s wits, and with the dank atmosphere of the Mint. He and Smith tried to lead captivity captive by issuing in conjunction the *Monitors,*[73] and later *The Oracle* already referred to, but inspiration, like those earlier friends, seems to have deserted them and both enterprises failed. Posterity could, however, afford to turn again the pages of Smith's *Memoirs of the Mint and Queen's-Bench: or, A true Account of the Government, Politics, Customs, Humours, and other Surprizing Curiosities of those Inchanted Provinces, Never publish'd before. With a Character of the Marshall, In Several Letters to a Person of Quality* (1713). This pamphlet praises the Marshall of the Mint, William Broughton, and attempts to persuade him not to resign. It contains many amusing descriptions of that land of topsy-turvy. A poem by Tate is prefixed, in which the sad laureate sings the praises of Southwark and of Broughton, a strange descent from his early patron, the gay Earl of Dorset.

Tate's star had set in the theatre and in the world of poetry. The rising genius was Nicholas Rowe, before long (1715) to succeed him as laureate. After the production of *The Ambitious*

[73] There were twenty-one numbers of the *Monitors,* beginning March 2, 1712/13. The British Museum has also a pamphlet addressed *To the People of Quality and Gentry To whom these Poems are Directed,* which gives further information about Smith's efforts to free himself from debt.

Stepmother in 1700 at Lincoln's Inn Fields, Rowe's plays followed one another at leisurely intervals, and—except for that foolish farce, as Congreve called it, *The Biter* in 1704—with constant success. Charles Gildon and others found fault with them, but, in spite of churlish criticism, at least two of them remained good box-office plays through the century, and the best actors were happy to perform in them.

Rowe drifted close to the *Apollo* circle and knew Gay.[74] The issue of the journal for August 10-12, 1709, has verses by Nicholas Rowe *To the Gentlemen concern'd in the British Apollo, upon their Design of Introducing Musick into their Quarterly and Monthly Papers.* Certainly Rowe was a good man for a young writer to know in those days, and Gay and Pope both knew him early. During the *Apollo* years, Rowe was busy with his edition of Shakespeare, which appeared in 1709 in six volumes. One wonders whether these volumes found their way to Gay's shelves along with Hill's *Travels in the Ottoman Empire.* Gay's early play, *The Wife of Bath,* has many characters, situations, and even turns of phrase that suggest a careful study of Shakespeare, but of that more later. Rowe's library, sold on August 26, 1719, contained one poem of Gay's, *Trivia,* along with Swift's *Miscellanies* (1711), Waller, Drayton, Denham, John Philips's *Cyder,* Fenton's *Poems,* Pope's *Rape of the Lock,* Savage's *Wanderer,* Milton, Shakespeare, Donne, *Hudibras,* Pope's *Temple of Fame* and two Dryden items, the five volumes of *Miscellanies* and his *Fables.*

A rather typical group were these men of the *Apollo,* at any rate at its inception—Hill and Gay and Marshall Smith, Mauclerc and Coward, Arbuthnot possibly, Roger Grant, and whoever else. They were men of various occupations, but all, if we may borrow a phrase from John Dunton,[75] had some yammerings upon them after learning and the muses, and *The British Apollo* provided an excellent medium for expression.

[74] Dr. James Welwood, Rowe's intimate friend and earliest biographer, was also one of those who presided at the birth of *The British Apollo.* See his preface to Rowe's translation of Lucan's *Pharsalia.* Welwood was a historian and a translator of some importance himself.

[75] *The Life and Errors of John Dunton* (1705), p. 247.

They made a success of it for two years and more. Subscriptions flowed in apace. First published but twice a week, the paper very soon appeared three times a week, a sure index of success. As early as May 26, 1708, the editors boast that their journal is taken in at public houses in great numbers, and at many more private houses than any other paper. The financial returns during these first two years must have been by no means despicable. Dunton gives us figures for one of the journals of the time, *The Postman,* and good substantial ones they are. He speaks of Fonvive, the editor: "His learning deserves respect and his gravity a weekly panegyric; his sagacious look is an index of his thoughtful soul; he is ever cheerful (the gaining of 600 l. a year by a penny paper would make any man so)."[76]

There were always discontents among readers, who felt that the authors of *The British Apollo* were merely a "Club of Silly Fellows, who write for Bread," a reasonably accurate description of some of them, if one wants to be ill-natured. By the spring of 1710 protests grow more serious:

> You Bastards of *Apollo,* I have sent you several letters but your ignorance has made you keep silence, for I see in every paper you *Ansur* nothing but some *Redicolous* silly Stuff of your *Oun* inventing and as I have heard in Sundry Coffee-houses, I shall give a little of your *Charector* to the Tattler, I will write you no more but *Redicule* you on all occasions, Your paper deserves the Name of the Brutish Apollo, rather than British Apollo. I am with disrespect. R. S.[77]

Most of the more gifted partners in the enterprise had by this time been bought off by Marshall Smith, and the new talent announced as arriving from Oxford and the Royal Society was probably a fiction of the editor's brain, while *Abennigo Simpleton* only, as Smith was called by his enemies, ran the paper. By April and May, news was getting slack; it never had been a strong feature in *The British Apollo.* Questions were in later issues confined almost entirely to theology and love, and the verses printed were sillier than ever. Smith had a special new

[76] *Ibid.,* p. 240.

[77] *The British Apollo,* Nov. 2, 1709.

enemy to face in the person of *The Tatler*, an enemy who is always spoken of with high respect and even friendliness, but who would presently, as Gay puts it in *The Present State of Wit*, drive *Apollo* out of this end of town to take refuge in his final phase with country bumpkins. The character of *The Tatler* is dealt with at length in the March 3-6, 1710, issue of *Apollo*. A correspondent, wider awake to Mr. Bickerstaff's indebtedness than some modern editors, propounds the following query:

Q. 'Tis allowed your Paper was the first in these times publish'd under the Notion of an Amusement, and very probably the Success of it gave birth to a Thought of the Author of the *Tatler* under the Name of *Esq. Bickerstaff*, to proceed in another way of Amusement, so that in some Sense he may be said to Invade your Property. I doubt not but by this time, you are sensible, the Incouragement, he has met with, hath tended much to your prejudice. Now my request is, that under these Circumstances, you will give your impartial Opinion of that Paper.

A. That every week we increase the number of our Subscribers, all they who take in Subscriptions for us will witness; nor can we be under the least Apprehensions of a Decrease, whilst there be *Inquisitive People* in the World, which will most certainly continue long after our Date. However we frankly own, the universal Approbation that Gentleman's Paper has met with may have prevented us from gaining near two thousand Subscribers, we might have had more, had not that been publish'd. Yet the satisfaction we take in reading it, so far vanquishes all prejudice we might be supposed to have conceiv'd against the Author, on any account whatsoever, that we shall give our Opinion of it, in the following manner. We believe nothing at present extent, will tend so much to the Improvement of Morality as that Paper; for by the just Merit couch'd in the Method and Disposition of it, together with the alluring Perswasion and Delicateness of the Style, the Author hath gain'd such an ascendant over Mankind, that he can freely expose the Vices and Follies of both Sexes, without the least occurring their Displeasure. Our People of Condition whose Natures are Refin'd by Education and Conversation, and thereby adapted for the brightest Impressions, are shockt at the approach of a Rough Hand, from which they suspect more the effects of ill Nature or Design, than real Inclination to Improve them. But a softer Hand gently touches all the Keys of

their Souls, and plays what tune it pleases on them, while every Touch produces Harmony:[78] And such this *Author* is happy in: Besides he dresses up Virtue in such Beautiful Attire, that they cannot help being inamour'd on her; while he exposes Vice and Folly to their contempt, indeavouring more to engage their Aversion by *Shame* than by *frightful Appearances,* for that makes a deeper and more durable Impression on the Minds of the Ingenuous, than the other. The most material Objections against him, are his *Personal Reflections;* but we must consider, everything has two Handles, and if People will catch at the wrong, the Author cannot help that; but allowing the worst that can be imagin'd, He might have a noble *distant View,* even in that: For observing the vicious Tast of the Age, and how Inclin'd to prejudice, He might by those agreeable ways, make his first Approaches to their Hearts, till he had gain'd an Empire over them, which now he has attain'd, his Distributions appear all Consonant to the strictest Rules of Morality; and we therefore recommend him to the Reading of all our Subscribers. To conclude, we have no other Design in all we have said, than to give a just *due to Merit,* we being wholly Strangers to his *Person,* nor hath the least Transaction of any kind ever past between us.

The race for popularity between these two polite enemies could end but one way, and, though Steele "flang up" his *Tatler* before *The British Apollo* finally expired, the latter took so long dying that most people were unaware of its continued existence, and even Gay in his *Present State of Wit* (May 3, 1711), reviewing London journals, almost forgot to mention it. The following week *Apollo* ceased to appear.

With these men, or with men so like them that these will do to set the picture, Gay passed his novitiate in the art of prose pamphleteering. That he knew this world of fly-by-night journalism from the inside is clear from his account of it in *The Present State of Wit,* which appeared on May 3, 1711. By that time he was obviously making use of all his friends, including new ones like Pope, to help him find publishers for these flowers of his wit. It even looks as if he may have helped Steele with *The Tatler,* for that set of the collected numbers on royal

[78] The argument here sounds much like Gay's in *The Present State of Wit.*

paper would scarcely have been sent merely as a gracious acknowledgment of Gay's flattery in *The Present State of Wit*. We know that Gay helped Steele later with *The Guardian*, and the suspicion remains that some of Gay's early prose may be tucked away undiscoverable in the pages of the more famous journal. However that may be, the only early prose pamphlet by Gay that remains identifiable is so masterly in its control of style, so incisive in its judgments, so well informed about the occult details of this newspaper world, that one cannot suppose that the master hand which wrote it should have been idle through these years or still less unrecognized as useful by Steele, whose friendship with Gay began early. Practice must have perfected that style; it is uncommonly brilliant even in a time when many men wrote good prose.

This promising pamphlet, *The Present State of Wit in a Letter to a Friend in the Country*, appeared on or shortly after May 3, 1711. The author is careful to premise "that, as you know, I never cared one farthing, either for Whig or Tory," and then goes on to survey all the important newspapers and journals of the town. This sort of thing had been done before and would be done frequently again. Perhaps Addison's facetious comments on the news-writers in *The Tatler* for May 21, 1709, started the pretty game, which is sometimes serious, sometimes comical. Addison suggests how desperately dependent Boyer and Buckley, Dyer and Dawks are on the continuation of the war. Peace would ruin them; and since this is inevitable, we must see to it that a special new wing is attached to the Chelsea Hospital for the accommodation of decrepit newswriters. A few months later, on September 27, *The General Postscript* appeared. This was announced as "an Extract of all that's most Material from the *Foreign* and *English* Newspapers; with Remarks upon the *Observator*, *Review*, *Tatlers*, and the rest of the Scriblers: In a Dialogue between Novel and Scandal." Dunton thought this was written by Charles Leslie, author of *The Rehearsal*.[79] In any case it has a strong Tory

[79] See the dedication of Dunton's *Athenianism* (p. x) and his remark about *Abennigo Simpleton*. See also Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes*, IV, 83.

bias. The writer delivers himself adversely on all the weekly papers and pamphlets as being barren and impertinent, and finally in No. 12 he gives a valuable list of all the papers appearing on each day of the week with tart comments on each of them. *The British Apollo* is supposedly run by a society of gentlemen, consisting, says the author, of Abennigo Simpleton only. Defoe is called Verbosus Enthusiasticus. This early attempt to start a Review of Reviews exhausted itself after twenty numbers. Apparently the last one was published on November 11, 1709.

Gay's purpose was not so ambitious. He commented on all of the journals that he thought of any importance, and his predilections in politics are not entirely clear. Probably they were not actually clear at that time anyway. Swift, who found an annoying condescension in the remarks on *The Examiner*, put the author down as certainly Whig.[80] *The Examiner* "is a Paper, which all Men, who speak without Prejudice, allow to be well Writ." The first *Examiners*, says our author, abound in wit, the last in humor. The paper is supposedly written "by the Direction, and under the Eye of some Great Persons who sit at the helm of Affairs." Its reputed author is Swift, with the assistance sometimes of Atterbury and Prior. The chief Whig organ, *The Medley*, gets scant praise, "the Author of which Paper, tho' he seems to be a Man of good Sense, and expresses it luckily enough now and then, is, I think, for the most part, perfectly a Stranger to fine Writing." Later, Gay speaks of the same journal as the work of Oldmixon, "supervised by Mr. *Mayn*[*warin*]*g*, who perhaps might intirely write those few Papers which are so much better than the rest."

What made Swift think the author Whiggish was the praise heaped on Steele and Addison, with both of whom Swift was at that moment distinctly out of patience. Having turned Tory himself, he expected all his old Whig friends to follow his lead, and recalcitrance made him unhappily conscious of the color of his own coat. So the unknown author's praise of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* did not please him. "*Bickerstaff* ventur'd

[80] *Journal to Stella*, ed. G. A. Aitken (1901), p. 216.

to tell the Town, that they were a parcel of Fops, Fools, and vain Cocquets; but in such a manner, as even pleased them, and made them more than half enclin'd to believe that he spoke Truth."

The Tatler had ceased publication, whether, as some of the town think, quite spent, or in submission to the government, or only with a mind to vary his shape. And now in place of it appeared *The Spectator* every day, once again showing "so excellent a Stile, with so nice a Judgment, and such a noble profusion of Wit and Humour." Gay is confident that once again Steele and his friend are busy, for these two great geniuses stand in a class by themselves, "so high above all our other Wits." He suggests that Addison try to keep Steele's Whig prejudices in control, lest "that wit which is at present a Common Good" should become "Odious and Ungrateful to the better part of the Nation." There speaks the coming Tory. Defoe, trapesing along as usual in the footsteps of Harley, had by this time left the Whigs and was writing for peace and South Sea trade; yet he gets scant courtesy from Gay: "The Poor *Review* is quite exhausted, and grown so very Contemptible, that tho' he has provoked all his Brothers of the Quill round, none of them will enter into a Controversy with him." He was a man of excellent natural parts, adds Gay, but wanted a small foundation of learning, and "as an Ingenious Author says, will endure but one Skimming."

Perhaps at this time Gay felt himself slipping away from his old party allegiances; and his description of himself as a man of no party may be true even in the sense which *The Examiner* had given to the phrase. "Whoever," says an early number of that journal, "gives himself that Character, you may depend upon it, is *of a Party;* but 'tis of *such a Party* as he is *asham'd* to own."[81]

The world of these journalists was rapidly becoming an unfit place for a genuine man of no party. Two years later (1713) up comes an imaginary letter from the lower world which fitly describes the final hell of the pamphleteers. All

[81] *The Examiner*, Sept. 14-21, 1710.

balance of judgment, all sanity must be set aside. "Fail not, on all Occasions, to throw Dirt" seems to have been their motto. This pamphlet, *The Infernal Congress*, tells how

> Our unhappy Divisions have been fomented by the Hirelings of each Party, who, like Pickpockets, wrangle among themselves that they may with less Suspicion dive into the Fobs of the unwary Spectators; the late Tax has suppress'd several of these Politicians; the *Observator*, before his Decease, had so stupified his Brains with the Countryman's *October*, that his *Quietus* was a Relief to his sinking Genius: The *Review*, who was last Winter an Eminent Jockey at *Utrecht*, now (like Prince *Almanzor*) attacks sometimes his Foes, and sometimes his Friends. *Jack Dyer's* Letter is entirely calculated for Fox-hunters, and works best over a Barrel of Brown Beer. The Ingenious Mr. *Roper* is ambitious to appear in the first Rank of Heroes, and (*Jacob*-like) would cheat his Elder Brother, the *Examiner*, of his Birthright; his Reflections are sometimes so pungent that I have seen them draw Tears of Remorse from the most obstinate Whigs. Orthodox *Ridpath*, who is the present Oracle of the High-flying Whigs, has sung their Heroic Actions in *Gracious-street* in Lofty Strains, and seems inclined to make a farther Essay in Poetry, which makes the Party apprehensive that he will retire to *Duck-lane*, and there sing his own Ballads.[82]

One might well hesitate to enter this inferno of the party-writers. Most of them were a hopeless lot. There is some slight evidence that Gay plunged into it for a time, and that may as well be dealt with here. It need scarcely be said that at no time in our literary history has the party-hack found so ready a market for his wares. Both parties maintained, informally of course, liaison officers eager to attach wavering genius to one or the other side. One might have expected Gay to be mustered into the little senate of Button's. But Gay still clung to the older group at Will's—some of them Whigs—to Garth, Rowe, and Congreve. Addison—as we shall see later—was always cool towards Gay. He may well have doubted Gay's adaptability for party purposes. Gay's genuine distaste for the

[82] *The Infernal Congress: or, News from Below. Being a Letter from Dick Estcourt, The late Famous Comedian, To the Spectator.* The Second Edition Corrected (1713). The passage is from the preface.

pamphleteering game, as well as the suggestion that perforce he had taken part in it, is hinted by the opening lines of *Rural Sports* (1713):

> Faction embroils the World; and ev'ry Tongue
> Is fraught with Malice, and with Scandal hung:
> Friendship, for Sylvan Shades, does Courts despise,
> Where all must yield to Int'rest's dearer Ties;
> Each Rival *Machiavel* with Envy burns,
> And Honesty forsakes them All by turns;
> Whilst Calumny upon each Party's thrown,
> Which Both abhor, and Both alike disown.
> Thus have I, 'midst the Brawls of factious Strife,
> Long undergone the Drudgery of Life;
> On Courtiers Promises I founded Schemes,
> Which still deluded me, like golden Dreams;
> Expectance wore the tedious Hours away,
> And glimm'ring Hope roll'd on each lazy Day.

If Gay ever wrote for the party press it was probably under Swift's leadership. In 1713 appeared a pamphlet called *Two Letters Concerning the Author of the Examiner.*[83] The writer —possibly Steele—tells his friend in the country much about the changes that have taken place since the old days:

> It is now above five Years since you left the Town; in which time, I must inform you, that the Number of Pamphlets and of flying Papers is become double to what it was, when you first betook yourself to your Retirement. Persons of the first Rank and Quality, Ministers of State, Members of Parliament, Men of Wit and Pleasure, Clergymen from the highest to the lowest, Persons that dwell in Palaces and abound in Wealth, and Men that live in Garrets and starve over their Standishes, have taken up the fashionable Amusement of writing in *Masquerade*, and come in Crowds to the Press under borrowed Forms and personated Characters. The *Whigs* often write under the Disguise of *Tories;* and the *Tories* often appear in Print in the Likeness of *Whigs.*[84]

With all this subterfuge and ironic method always at hand to deceive the unwary, with a number of writers appearing in

[83] Mr. Paul Bunyan Anderson calls attention to this pamphlet in his Harvard thesis on *Mary de la Rivière Manley* (1931), p. 309, and thinks that Gay may have contributed to *The Examiner.* [84] P. 8.

various roles in a paper like *The Examiner*, the country friend will be glad of a bit of advice. The great Tory journal is a particularly difficult problem.

> One Day the Whim will take him to write in the Person of a Footman, and then he calls for his blue Livery embroidered with Silver; this is what he appears oftenest in when he goes into Coffee-houses and the Play-House. When he is tired of this Extream, he flies out into another quite opposite; he puts on a green Ribbon, and fancies himself a Lord; another while he calls for a light Wig and a pair of fringed Gloves, and assumes the jaunty Air and Mien of *Cato Junior;* very often he puts on a Gown and Cassock, and flaunts it in the Court of Requests, and goes about to great Mens Tables; and sometimes nothing will serve this Extravagant, but he must be dressed up like a poor Whore, in Petticoats and tawdry Ribbons. But what is surprizing in these Vagaries of the *Examiner* is, that these various Dresses strike his Imagination so strongly, that they influence his Brain, and give a different Turn to his Manner of thinking: for it has been observed by Men acquainted with his Freaks, that he is never so learned and so witty as when he wears his Cassock; never so arrogant and so pedantick as in his Livery; nor at any time so ignorant and so dull, as when he puts on his green Ribbon; and never so scurrilous, so abandoned, and so impudent, as in Petticoats.[85]

Now, this description finds places for those whom we know to have been contributors to *The Examiner* at one time or another, Swift, Oldisworth, St. John, and Mrs. Manley. And the temptation is almost irresistible to fit John Gay into the picture as the footman in blue and silver livery.

From 1712 to 1714 Gay was secretary and domestic steward in the household of the Duchess of Monmouth, and might well have been described as a footman by hostile pens. Moreover, Gay was extremely partial to those particular colors at this time, as we see from references to blue and silver in *The Shepherd's Week* and in Gay's *Epistle* to Oxford asking for money for the Hanover trip a little later. Curll, in the *Faithful Memoirs . . . of Mrs. Anne Oldfield* (1731), attempts to link the names of Pope and Arbuthnot and "some others of their Clan" with the

[85] Pp. 13-14.

list of known writers in *The Examiner*, Mrs. Manley, Swift, Bolingbroke, Prior, and Oldisworth. And yet, if Gay is the footman in blue and silver, how explain a later phrase in the same pamphlet, "Jonathan, ap Harry, ap Charles, ap William, ap Betty"? Who is Charles, and where is John? Moreover, we must remember that if the writer of this pamphlet really meant Gay, all we can infer is that he stated one of the many guesses current in coffeehouse gossip. The evidence is all indeterminate, and one is forced to suppose that although Gay probably issued from time to time partisan tracts the authorship of which he preferred to leave unnoticed, and may even have helped the Tories in the last year or two of *The Examiner*, he at no time developed a genuine interest in politics, and few suspected his incursions into this particularly uninviting part of Grub Street.

V

Though Gay was interested vitally in poetry during these years and willing to try his hand at prose if need be, he had his eye on that third possibility of the literary career, writing for the theatre. Hill was writing plays and Hill was manager of one of the houses, indeed of both houses at one time, and if Hill could stand the footlights why should not Gay humor his own aspirations. We can watch him making the transition from one form to another in the spring of 1712, since he used the same material first for a prose pamphlet and later for a farce apparently written for the boards, though, so far as I can discover, never acted.

Lintot's *Miscellany* (1712), like most books of the time, carried a neat packet of advertisements for "Books printed for Bernard Lintott." Among these was *An Argument Proving from History, Reason, and Scripture, That the Present Mohocks and Hawkubites are the Gog and Magog mention'd in the Revelations; and therefore That this vain and transitory World will shortly be brought to its final Dissolution. Written by a Reverend Divine, who took it from the Mouth of the Spirit of a Person who was lately slain by one of the Mohocks.* This was a broadside, printed on reverse also, and published on March

18, 1712.[86] It was written presumably by Gay, since the copy in the British Museum is so marked by a contemporary hand, and since the whole pamphlet appears later in the Swift *Miscellanies,* along with other work of Gay and his friends.[87] Apparently for some six months in the autumn of 1711 and the spring of 1712, the public imagination was somewhat overheated by tales of the midnight frolics of town-rakes, no longer called Scourers as in the days of Charles II, but Mohocks. The four Indian Kings had been a town sensation in the previous year, and both the name of their tribe and their fancied ferocity were transferred to the town-rakes. The whole excitement may have been cooked up for political purposes. The Tories felt responsible for law and order and affected to treat the whole excitement as frivolous propaganda set afloat by the Whigs to discredit the government. When forced to take serious notice of the disorders, the authorities were careful to arrest scions of the great Whig families and thus throw the smoke screen of party feeling over their own incompetence. The Whigs protested, of course, as one may see from the issue of *The Medley*, March 28, 1712. This number is directed against the Tory rumors of Whig implication in the Mohock business. In discussing ironically the disturbance caused by the Mohocks, the author writes:

An *ingenious* and *learned Doctor* had almost finished a very *pious Meditation* upon the *Hoop-Petticoat;* when, on a sudden, he was commanded to go upon another Task; immediately thereupon he dropt the Petticoat, and furbish'd up in haste the *Mohock Catechism;* in which *he* (according to the Old Saying) has *kill'd two Birds with one Stone;* at once dispersing abroad the *Story* of the *Mohocks*, and *burlesquing* the *Catechism* of the *Church.* Another; Mr. *W.* had certainly given us in a very little time a *Clear Explanation* of the *70 Weeks*, had not these *Plaguy Mohocks* unexpectedly overturn'd his whole *Scheme* of *Chronology;* so that now, instead of putting out a *Comment* upon *Daniel*, he has endeavored to prove

[86] *The Medley*, March 17, 1712. "Tomorrow will be publish'd, An Argument proving from History, Reason . . ."

[87] *Miscellanies in Four Volumes.* By Dr. Swift, Dr. Arbuthnot, Mr. Pope, and Mr. Gay. The Fifth Edition Corrected: With Several Additional Pieces in Verse and Prose (1747), III, 229.

from undoubted Testimony, That the present *Mohocks* and *Hawkubites* are the *Gog* and *Magog* mentioned in the *Revelations*.

Oldmixon, editor of *The Medley*, evidently thought Swift and William Wagstaffe the authors of these broadsides. It does not seem to me likely that a work by Wagstaffe would creep into the *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* (1747). The various items included in those volumes were announced as by Swift, Arbuthnot, Pope, or Gay. Oldmixon would know of Wagstaffe's co-operation with Swift in Tory pamphleteering, while the few things of that sort which Gay did were not talked about so freely as his. Moreover, one paragraph which contains an obscure reference to Toland and Collins was substituted in the *Miscellanies* for some innocuous, but far more pertinent, lines which occur in the 1712 broadside. This may mean that the reprint followed an early draft which had come into Pope's hands along with other Gay papers in 1732.

The town had suffered not only from Mohocks in these years; the French prophets were abroad, and from their nasal fanaticism Gay caught the tone for his pamphlet:

> I am the *Porter* that was barbarously slain in *Fleet-street:* by the Mohocks and Hawkubites was I slain, when they laid violent Hands upon me.
>
> They put their Hook into my Mouth, they divided my Nostrils asunder, they sent me, as they thought, to my long Home, but now I am returned again to foretel their Destruction.
>
> Yet the Day shall come, when the Mohocks shall be as the Moabites, and the Hawkubites as the Children of Ammon.
>
> Yet two Days, a Day and Half a Day, yea, upon the twelfth Hour of the fourth Day, those Emblems of Gog and Magog at the *Guild-Hall* shall fall to the Ground, and be broken asunder. With them shall perish the Mohocks and Hawkubites, and the whole World shall perish with them.

The broadside contains also a pleasantly vicious mock-litany against the Mohocks, calculated no doubt to catch the eye of the ballad singers and thus start other vibrations going in the government's rather limited broadcast. The song on this subject which swept the streets was called *The Huzza:*

When the Streets are all clear,
The Town is our Own;
We manage the Humour, and laugh at the Fear
Of all those we Lay on.
Down goes the Bully, the Heck, and Night-Walker;
But oh! the Brisk Girl, we will never forsake her.
The Constable flies,
And his Clubmen withdraw,
When they hear the fierce Cries
Of the dreadful Huzza, Huzza, Huzza—[88]

Gay's interest in the Mohocks was not confined to this apocalyptic outburst which we have just noted. At the beginning of the row apparently—Queen Anne's first proclamation relating to the disorders is dated October 22, 1711—Gay wrote a farce called *The Mohocks* and attempted in vain to get it produced.[89] He may have seen a broadside sheet called *The Town-Rakes: or, The Frolics of the Mohocks,* as some of the details recounted indignantly by the possibly Whiggish writer of this appear facetiously dressed up in the play. The players refused the farce, and Gay printed it on April 15, 1712.[90] The players were probably right. The humor is somewhat forced, and whatever virtue the play has is second-hand. Dogberry and Verges appear under other names, as does the poetic soul of Bottom the weaver. The fluttering fop part is there waiting in vain for Cibber, and Falstaffian boasting is executed with a zest that almost gives it originality. There is a touch of smart satire on

[88] The collection of papers connected with the Mohocks in the Harvard College Library contains a leaf from an old songbook, on which these verses and more are printed. This collection contains also *A True List of the Names of the Mohocks and Hawkubites Who were Apprehended and Taken on Monday night, Tuesday, and this Morning. With an Account of the several Prisons they were committed to, where they are now to be seen. Admitted to Bail a Pious L———'s Son not Ten Miles from St. John's Square.* This was probably Lord Sandwich. Edward, Lord Hinchingbrooke, Steele's friend, was also implicated in reports of the rioting. See also *The Mohocks: a Poem, in Miltonic Verse: Address'd to the Spectator* (1712). This attempts to defend the Mohocks as rough executors of justice on dishonest vintners, obnoxious coachmen, pimps, and other brothel-house functionaires. And note *The Tatler,* No. 77.

[89] See *The Poetical Register* (1719): "The Mohocks; a Farce, never acted"; *A Compleat Catalogue Of all the Plays That were ever yet Printed in the English Language* [1718]: *Mohocks* marked as never acted; *The British Theatre* (1750): "The Mohocks, a Farce never acted, but printed."

[90] *Daily Courant* for April 15, 1712: "This day is published . . ."

the ways of the law, which reminds one of Gay's later attitudes. The *Prologue* and *Epilogue* are cleverly written in Dryden's manner. The one thing which gives this little play a certain right to live, at least on the printed page, is the multitude of topical allusions which show that its author was awake to the life of the streets, soon to become, if you like, the laureate of the disinherited. Here they are, the watchmen and street-molls, the press gangs and Italian eunuchs, the mountebanks ready to draw a tooth with a touch, the chairmen and cinder-wenches. Gay loved the street corners, made ballads for the beggar girls to sing, dragged Swift about to share his plebeian pleasures; and when we find in a forgotten broadside the words "See Johnny Gay on porters' shoulders rise," we begin to understand at least one phase of the man's nature.[91]

[91] *Catalogue of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum*, Division I, Political and Personal Satires, Vol. II, June, 1689-1733, p. 766, No. 1899, "RICH'S GLORY or his Triumphant Entry into Covent Garden."

CHAPTER II

DIRECTION FOUND—THE YEAR 1713

I

The friendship between Gay and Pope was by the end of 1712 getting a fair amount of cement about it. Gay's quite unnecessarily rude dedication of *The Mohocks* to John Dennis some three months after the appearance of the old critic's *Reflections upon the Essay on Criticism* could scarcely have displeased Pope. Early in this year, a correspondence was under way between them, which lapsed for some months in the summer while Gay was visiting his old home in Devonshire. Pope, ill during part of the time, and later visiting the Carylls in Sussex, seems to have lost track of Gay, though he made inquiries. The first letter we have from their correspondence is from Pope to Gay, dated November 13, 1712. Pope was attracted, he says, by two qualities in Gay, good nature and ingenuity. In other words, he recognized his ability and liked him as a man. Another quality in Gay which Pope quickly recognizes is a certain shyness and self-depreciation, "two eternal foes to merit." Pope writes very soon again (December 24) to congratulate Gay on his appointment as domestic steward in the household of the Duchess of Monmouth. He is glad that Gay no longer has to depend entirely on the favors of the Muses for sustenance, but reminds him pertinently that those "nine other ladies" still have claims.

The problem of sustenance, to use Chaucer's word, reminiscent of a phrase which Pope, with evident delight in the lascivious suggestion, just fails to quote, must have been acute at this time for Gay. Those penny-a-line verses, broadsides, party pamphlets, or whatever, those plays that were never acted, provided but precarious support for a gentleman, especially for one who, like Gay, persisted all his life in a rather casual atti-

tude towards money; and his appointment to a settled post must have given him genuine satisfaction.

The introduction to the Duchess appears to have come through one of Gay's Inner Temple friends, Maurice Johnson of Spalding, Lincolnshire, whose father was steward of the Monmouth estates in the neighborhood of that town. Young Maurice had a very genuine interest in literature and antiquities, and his name is remembered today—at least in his native place—as the founder of the Gentlemen's Society of Spalding, which still flourishes. Gay had met him probably in the company of Fortescue or Budgell, and had taken pains to introduce him to his other friends at Button's. The record of that little service can be read in its original and ungrammatical form as a footnote in the Minute-Book of the Gentlemen's Society:

> Maurice Johnson the Author of this Essay & Founder of this Society who being by Mr. John Gay the Poet brought acquainted with Mr. Pope Addison became with Sir R. Steel & others of his meeting at one Button's who had been his Butler & kept a Coffee house in Covent garden where the Tatlers were taken out of the Lyon there receiving them & read to the Company.

It seems probable that Johnson introduced Gay to the Duchess of Monmouth as a return compliment. He would be likely to hear that the Duchess needed a secretary and would be able to bring his father's influence to support any recommendation he might make. It should perhaps be emphasized that the Johnsons were by no means humble people, but were accustomed to entertain their patron and her family in their fine old mansion, Ayscoughfee Hall, at Spalding. This suggestion that Johnson was the intermediary between Gay and the Duchess of Monmouth is further supported by an interesting letter in the archives of the Gentlemen's Society from John Johnson to his brother. John was at the Inner Temple and writes (May 2, 1713) to describe the reception given to Addison's *Cato*. He speaks of calling on the Duchess and meeting Gay there, and his phrases, I think, suggest a certain feeling of responsibility for the success of the new secretary. "I am told

at the Dutches's Mr. Gay is every day at the Playhouse morning & afternoone seeing his Play rehearsed. they don't seem displeased at it but kindly concerned for the succes of it."

The play referred to was *The Wife of Bath,* and we shall hear more of that presently. This letter shows clearly enough that Gay's relations with the Monmouth family after the first six months of his engagement were cordial; the same spirit of interest and encouragement appears in a letter that Gay wrote about this time to Maurice Johnson sending him a copy of his recently published *Rural Sports,* and telling him that the Duchess and the Lady Isabella appeared very well pleased with his offering.[1] The Duchess lived at this time in a mansion at the upper end of Lawrence Street, Chelsea, known for many years—until it was pulled down in 1833—as Monmouth House, and here we may think of her poet-secretary as living for the next year and a half, in pleasant society and with not too many demands on his time.[2] Doubtless he sometimes found an element of slavery in this conversation with insolent greatness, as his friend Rowe puts it,[3] but the Duchess, we gather, usually reserved her insolence for equals and superiors, and treated Gay with more consideration than one would have expected. The Princess Caroline was very fond of Gay's Duchess, Lady Cowper tells us, and found in her the life and fire of youth as well as wit and good nature.[4] Gay was lucky! She was sixty-two at this time, a woman with a real joy of living.

Comfortably situated at Monmouth House, welcomed at Will's and Button's, with a growing circle of friends, Gay began the year 1713 with brighter hopes than could ever have been his before. He and Budgell, Fortescue, Johnson, Pope and the rest

[1] See Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes,* VI, 84-85, and his "Antiquities in Lincolnshire," *Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica* (1790), III, xxi, xxii, of Appendix.

[2] Allen Fea, *King Monmouth* (1902), p. 371.

[3] Nicholas Rowe, "Essay of the Manner of living with Great Men," *Poetical Works* (2d ed., 1720), p. 89. "What Slavery is it to a Ridiculous Vanity to hunt after the Conversation of insolent Greatness! What Peace, what Ease, what Happiness does a Man forego, who might be used as he pleases amongst his Equals, and yet chuses to put himself upon the Rack, to make a Lord laugh!"

[4] *Diary of Mary Countess Cowper, Lady of the Bedchamber to the Princess of Wales, 1714-1720* (1864), p. 125.

no doubt rather fancied themselves as men about town, or, as Swift called them, men who knew the world. "Every idle young Rake, who understands how to pick up a Wench, or bilk a Hackney-Coachman, or can call the Players by their Names, and is acquainted with five or six Faces in the Chocolate-House, will needs pass for a Man that *knows the World*."[5]

Some phases of that world he found intolerable. From time to time, news and politics and faction, malice and scandal, friendship's giving way to interest's dearer ties, seemed its most conspicuous features to him, and the emphasis he laid on this petty wrangling does not suggest an altogether complacent mind. Nearly every summer, however, he managed to get away to the country, and with Vergil beside him and England's pleasant fields around he found inspiration for some of his best verses. In 1712, it had been Devonshire with Fortescue; in 1713, it was Moor Park with the Monmouth family and their friends, shooting with my Lord Essex, learning French with the Lady Isabella and Lord Lumley (later Scarborough).[6]

The new post proved highly suitable for Gay. It enabled him to forget his financial worries in a limited amount of routine work, and to use his spare time in writing, so that the next two years proved productive and laid a solid foundation for his reputation. A few scornful, and doubtless envious, acquaintances in Grub Street talked and wrote of him as the lackey of a superannuated Duchess, and even Dr. Johnson later suggested that by quitting the shop (the shop was at least five years behind!) for such service, Gay might gain leisure, but he certainly advanced little in the boast of independence. It occurred to none of Gay's real friends at the time that this appointment was anything but the highest good fortune. Pope wrote the letter of congratulation mentioned above urging him not to forget his service of the Muses amidst his new duties,[7] and Arbuthnot somewhat later, when Gay's Hanover expedition

[5] *The Importance of the Guardian Consider'd, in a Second Letter to the Bailiff of Stockbridge.* By a Friend of Mr. St——le (1713), p. 35.

[6] James Thorne, *Handbook to the Environs of London* (1876), p. 507.

[7] Pope, *Works*, VII, 409-410.

had proved a fiasco, regretted that Gay had ever left the Monmouth household.[8]

A new quietness and confidence came to Gay, and the results show in his work. *Rural Sports* appeared on January 13; *The Wife of Bath* took the boards on May 12; *The Fan* was ready for publication December 8, as were the four poems, *Panthea, Araminta, A Thought on Eternity,* and *A Contemplation on Night,* which appeared in Steele's *Miscellany* in the same month. In addition to these, he wrote two papers at least for *The Guardian,*[9] and some articles it may be, as already suggested, for *The Examiner.* The tradesman in letters had at last found a market.

Years later, in a letter to Swift dated July 18, 1731, Gay talks about his own habits of composition in a way which is illuminating to us as we approach the study of his early work.

> I have no scheme at present, either to raise my fame or fortune. I daily reproach myself for my idleness. You know one cannot write when one will. I think and I reject. One day or other, perhaps, I may think on something that may engage me to write. You and I are alike in one particular—I wish to be so in many—I mean, that we hate to write upon other folks' hints. I love to have my own scheme, and to treat it my own way. This, perhaps, may be taking too much upon myself, and I may make a bad choice; but I can always enter into a scheme of my own with more ease and pleasure, than into that of other bodies.[10]

It is just possible, in spite of the long chain of deprecatory critics linked head to tail, that Gay could diagnose the symptoms of his literary feverishness even as well as we can. Swift at any rate knew the history of Gay's efforts; he had seen his mind working—or failing to work—around the *Scriblerus* table, and he admits that Gay's statement of his own case is the correct one, "though it is possible that sometimes a friend may give you a lucky hint, just suited to your own imagination."

Let us examine then the "schemes" and their execution in this year 1713. Most fruitful in its suggestions for Gay was his

[8] Swift, *Letters,* ed. F. E. Ball (1910), II, 247.
[9] May 24 and Sept. 1.
[10] Swift, *Letters,* IV, 241-242.

reading of Vergil and of Chaucer, Vergil for the form and mellifluousness of his verses, Chaucer for the encouragement he gave to Gay's sly humor. *Rural Sports*[11] transfers Georgic patterns to the English scene in complete seriousness, more in the manner of John Philips, but traces of burlesque begin to appear in *The Fan*, and dominate completely *The Shepherd's Week* and *Trivia*. Gay is closer to Vergil in spirit than any of his contemporaries, closer particularly than Thomson, who lacks that sense of pathos in human affairs which Gay has abundantly. One is continually meeting passages in Gay that for many of us seem vaguely reminiscent of Goldsmith or Gray, so heavily is present-day criticism weighted against the earlier poet. Notice, for example, the lines in *Rural Sports* about the country maid:

> She gratefully receives what Heav'n has sent,
> And, rich in Poverty, enjoys Content.

Or the lines about nightfall:

> Or when the Lab'rer leaves the Task of Day,
> And trudging homewards whistles on the Way;
> When the big udder'd Cows with Patience stand,
> Waiting the Stroakings of the Damsel's Hand
> No Warbling chears the Woods; the Feather'd Choir
> To court kind Slumbers, to their Sprays retire;
> When no rude Gale disturbs the sleeping Trees,
> Nor Aspen Leaves confess the gentlest Breeze.

Other passages in this poem make use of the loose Newtonianism of the time, or introduce a strain of melancholy, which many a less original spirit was to capture later, as the novelty of image or idea became submerged in current fashions. The limbs laid at noonday on the mossy couch, with the shallow stream wandering by with murmuring noise below, sunset by the wide ocean, and then as night comes on,

> Millions of worlds hang in the spacious Air,
> Which round their Suns their Annual Circles steer.
> Sweet Contemplation elevates my Sense,
> While I survey the Works of Providence.

[11] *The Post-Boy*, Jan. 13-15, 1712/3: "This day is publish'd . . ."

This may not be great verse, but it is better than much that has been praised far more. After all, no English poet before Gay had thought of introducing the sports of the countryside into the framework of a georgic, so that in conception as well as in many of these details of execution the poem has originality. It is descriptive rather than purely instructional, though there is enough of the latter element to keep the model well in mind. Certainly the early version shows a lack of invention in the usual eighteenth-century meaning of that term, but Gay soon became conscious of this weakness, and made considerable revisions, especially in structure, when he prepared the poem for its appearance in the 1720 volume of *Poems on Several Occasions*.

The melancholy and speculative element which we have noted in *Rural Sports* appears again in *Panthea*. Here the disappointed lady turns from the hateful town:

> Oh! lead me to some melancholy cave,
> To lull my sorrows in a living grave;
> From the dark rock where dashing waters fall,
> And creeping ivy hangs the craggy wall,
> Where I may waste in tears my hours away,
> And never know the seasons or the day.

Once again in the pastoral elegy *Araminta*, the melancholy shade, the croaking raven, the old ruin, parade before us, making one fancy that Gay's imagination had been quickened by some of the Salvator Rosa landscapes about him in Charles Jervas's rooms or elsewhere. But in *Araminta* these descriptive suggestions are merely incidental. The real distinction of the poem is the "scheme" which Gay's fertile mind hit upon. With the second *Idyll* of Theocritus in mind, he planned the first of that long series of Town Eclogues with which eighteenth-century literature abounds, keeping the form of the pastoral elegy, but filling out his pictures not with Sicilian hills and fields and shepherds, but with St. James's and the Ring, with ladies at their toilette, with the killing glances and answering eyes of the beaux and belles of fashionable London.

The other two poems in Steele's *Miscellany*, *A Contemplation on Night* and *A Thought on Eternity*, are serious throughout, but serious with the long view, as men felt it in those days, of the new science. The Creator Spirit, the mysteries of whose vast energies were in times past unfathomable, now goes about his business of laying the world's foundations almost by schoolboy precept; at least we shall be able to think the thoughts of God after him, especially at night:

> Yet still, ev'n now, while darkness cloaths the land,
> We view the traces of th' almighty hand.

This idea grows trite within the next thirty years; its claims are exasperatingly comprehensive, and to our minds the explanations that once seemed satisfactory ring hollow, for we are apt to forget the genuine feeling that often fused the verses of this sort and produced a kind of sombre beauty such as we find in these early poems of Gay.

The Fan[12] was Gay's most ambitious and least effective effort of the year. Like the shield of Achilles, high engine for the fall of Troy, the fan is raised to its commanding place in woman's hand, a weapon for the fall of man. Strephon loves long but unsuccessfully; in answer to his prayer, Venus at the smithy of the gods produces the new toy, has it inscribed with proper legends to remind woman of her weaknesses, and brings it to Strephon, who in the end wins his suit. The lines are good wherever Gay touches social frivolities or has an opportunity to register the carefully detailed descriptions at which he was presently to show his peculiar power. The Momus episode is a welcome change of tone. Too much of the poem, however, retells the stories from Ovid rather aimlessly; the narrative pattern is insufficiently marked, and often lost completely in a mass of pointless decoration. It is nothing but machinery. Pope's advice may have been disastrous, though we need not blame him for the sad results of his suggestions. "I am glad your Fan is mounted so soon, but I would have you varnish and glaze it at your leisure, and polish the sticks as much as you can."[13]

[12] *Daily Courant*, Dec. 9, 1713: "Yesterday was publish'd," etc.

[13] Pope, *Works*, VII, 412.

The letter containing this advice was dated August 23, 1713, when Pope was busy in London trying with Jervas's assistance to learn to paint. During that month Gay was at Moor Park, where he remained until October 23 or longer.[14] The poem was composed, so Gay tells Fortescue, while he was at Moor Park that summer. One gathers from Pope's surprise at his friend's report of progress that the original draft of the poem was put through at top speed. Evidently, the polishing process went on from August 23 till the date of publication, December 8. Gay may have suggested that Pope read the poem in manuscript, but Pope put him off for a month with the plea that he was himself "deeply engaged in poetry." If Gay failed to force his friend's attention earlier, he got no suggestions at all from him, since the month's grace would leave only two weeks before the poem was actually on sale.[15]

We may not like *The Fan* particularly, but there is no doubt about its popularity throughout the eighteenth century. Two editions appeared in 1714, a Dublin edition in 1727, another London edition in 1757, while the poem took its place naturally in the *Poems on Several Occasions,* 1720 and 1731. French translations (one verse and one prose) as well as a German appeared. Goldsmith was "selecting" it for the benefit of his young lady readers at late as 1767,[16] and in the same year Samuel Knight, Master of Arts at Trinity College, Cambridge, grouped this poem with *The Rape of the Lock* and Prior's *Henry and Emma* for enthusiastic praise:

[14] *Ibid.,* VII, 410-412. The Morgan Library letter to Fortescue is dated Oct. 5, 1713.

[15] This letter, which Elwin and Courthope date Oct. 23, 1713 (VII, 412), cannot be thrown back a year in time, as Mr. Sherburn insists, since Pope was not in touch with Gay at all for "some months" preceding Nov. 13, 1712, and says so in the letter to Gay bearing that date. Gay's statement to Fortescue that he wrote the poem at Moor Park in 1713 must be taken at face value. Mr. Sherburn thinks Pope would have mentioned his *Homer* plans in a letter dated Oct. 23, 1713. He did not mention them to Caryll either in a letter dated Oct. 17, 1713; he merely said, "What poetical news I have to tell you shall be deferred till our meeting." To Gay he said, "I am deeply engaged in poetry, the particulars whereof shall be deferred till we meet." See George Sherburn, *The Early Career of Alexander Pope* (Oxford, 1935), p. 75 n.

[16] *Poems for Young Ladies. In Three Parts: Devotional, Moral, and Entertaining.* Selected by Dr. Goldsmith (1785).

Shall cold Oblivion ever snatch the lay
That consecrates Belinda's lock to Fame?
Shall Time destroy the fan of gentle Gay?
Or blot a page that boasts fair Emma's name?[17]

Needless to say, the Greek gods soon found themselves extremely busy in household manufacture, pattens, hoop-petticoats, thimbles, and so on, until the "gods-in-aid" type of story became a *petit genre* in eighteenth-century verse.

So much then for Gay's production of verse in 1713, the "schemes" he thought out for that year: country sports set in georgic patterns, high heroics applied to frivolities, a pastoral elegy on the model of Theocritus, sombre musings of the "graveyard" variety, and two poems on the rolling spheres and man's pettiness, not all original ideas, but dangerously near it, an offering which might well please the Duchess of Monmouth and the Lady Isabella, as well as Caryll, and the rapidly increasing circle of Gay's friends.[18]

II

The story of Gay's first struggles to make a name for himself is not complete until we revert to his experience with the theatre in May of that same year. He had been attempting to win recognition there since December, 1711.[19] *The Mohocks* had been refused, but at last his next piece, *The Wife of Bath*, was accepted by the players to follow *Cato* in the spring of 1713.

It is evident from a phrase in Pope's letter to Gay (December 24, 1712) that the two friends were at home with Chaucer at this time, and could depend on each other to cap quotations from him without effort. Pope, who had published his *January and May* in Tonson's *Miscellany* (1709), and revised (or possibly written)[20] the pieces which appear under Betterton's name in the Lintot *Miscellany* (May, 1712), was busy during the winter of 1712-1713 with his *Temple of Fame*, and would before long, possibly following Gay's lead, publish his mod-

[17] Samuel Knight, *Elegies and Sonnets* (1785), p. 29.
[18] See letters from Pope to Caryll (Pope, *Works*, VI, 202-203).
[19] See letter from Pope to Cromwell, Dec. 21, 1711 (Pope, *Works*, VI, 130).
[20] Sherburn, *The Early Career of Alexander Pope*, p. 50 n.

ernization of the prologue to the Wife of Bath's Tale. Gay himself attempted an imitation of Chaucer's style, *An Answer to the Sompner's Prologue of Chaucer,* which exemplified too well what most men of the time found in Chaucer—archaic diction, ragged verses, and questionable taste. Now in *The Wife of Bath* Gay took the hint for a number of his characters from the Canterbury group, borrowed a bit of plotting from Farquhar,[21] added reminiscences of speeches and scenes from Shakespeare, and served up the mélange, hoping for the best.

The title itself might be expected to carry the play, for the Wife of Bath had continued popular down through the years, especially in the ballads, and the story of her fortunes on earth, in hell, and heaven would still bring crowded buyers on the street corners. The last issue of the old ballad of the Wife of Bath was a Glasgow imprint of 1700, *The New Wife of Bath Much better Reformed, Enlarged, and Corrected, than it was formerly in the Old incorrect Copy.* Not so new and not so thoroughly reformed, she wanders through the pages of this ballad and meets Judas in the land of shades, who takes her to Hell-gate. Satan won't have her. Hoping for entrance to heaven, she has a grand flyting with Adam and all the patriarchs and apostles, until finally Christ admits her. In Gay's play, she has lost her sturdiness and seems closer to Mistress Quickly, and Gay is indebted to Shakespeare for much more than this. The scene in which the Franklin's servants arrest the wrong man while they discuss legal points, is straight from Dogberry, and the language of the drawers is that of *Henry IV:* "Coming, coming, Gentlemen—into the *Dragon,* Sir—I'll bring your Honour a Pint of the same immediately—coming, coming, Sir —Score a Quart of Sack in the *Dragon*—below there." The satire on astrology is at least a hundred years old (Dryden had just tried it), and the best social satire in the play comes from

[21] Giles Jacob noticed this. See his *Poetical Register: or, the Lives and Characters of the English Dramatick Poets, with an Account of their Writings* (1719), p. 115. He speaks of the play's "indifferent success," and remarks that "Part of the Plot seems to be taken from *Kite* in *The Recruiting Officer.*" This may have been one of the first plays Gay saw in London. It was performed in 1707.

the pages of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*,[22] such, for instance, as the scene where Doggrell reads his poetry to Chaucer, and the latter treats him as Addison did Ned Softly. The main weakness in the play is not this jumping about from age to age,[23] this snipping a bit from Chaucer, a bit from Shakespeare, and a bit from Farquhar or Addison; a more serious defect is its broken-backed plot. The interest is continually divided between the Florinda-Merit and the Myrtilla-Chaucer episodes. The second group of characters do not appear until the fourth scene of Act II, and during the entire fourth act they are forgotten. One needs no critical genius to be aware of these difficulties; Gay himself early recognized them and attempted, not with complete success, to get rid of them when he rewrote the play for a fresh production in 1730. In the second version the *liaison des scènes* is distinctly better; one scene develops naturally out of another, and minor interests are properly subordinated. The dialogue is smarter, though some good things are lost. The rather ponderous humor of some of the speeches disappears in favor of the lighter touch. Compare Alison's speech on apparitions, for example. In the version of 1713 it appears:

I have, thanks to Experience, seen Spirits of all Shapes, and all Countries—Why, a *Jerusalem* Spirit is no more like an *English* Spirit than a Hog is like a Rhinoceros.—I have been Witness of all the Devil's Frolicks—Idad, to my certain Knowledge, he makes nothing of unfurnishing a Kitchen to entertain himself with a Country-Dance of Dishes and Platters; many be the times and often, he has rattled my Curtains and made the Bed shake under me, when I have

[22] One of Alison's speeches at least must have been wrung from the heart of Gay's present experience: "O' my Conscience, great Folks keep a Cargo of impertinent Servants about them, to defend them from Visitants.—if ones Business leads one to dance Attendance after Quality, our Message, forsooth, must be deliver'd at the Door-Passage, and there, like a Watch Word through a Camp, it must fly through at least half a Dozen Skips before it can reach my Lord's Ears.—and now, forsooth, the World is come to a fine pass truly, that we must make Application to the Conjuror's Imp, in our way to the Conjurer." This speech suggests one more reason for the play's failure: the speeches do not fit the mouth.

[23] The mirror-scene at the astrologer's is borrowed from John Wilson's *The Cheats* (1662). See Genest, *Some Account of the English Stage from the Restoration in 1660 to 1830* (Bath, 1832), II, 514.

not had the Comfort of a Bedfellow; many a dark Night have I seen the headless Horse, and have had the Honour to Converse with the Queen of the Fairies.

In 1730, Alison disclaims belief:

To be sure, Madam, I never saw any thing worse than myself in all my life. Frighten'd, said you? Alack-a-day, all my skittish days are over. When I was young, indeed, like other young girls, I thought fear very becoming; and I had then, Madam, tho' I say it, a very genteel scream.

The dialogue is frequently abbreviated, unhappy stage tricks discarded, and a general tightening-up of the plot is obvious. Alison's charming song, "There was a Swain full fair," later a favorite in the songbooks, is lost in the revision.[24] Doggrell's verses, strangely enough, are *improved* in the revised version. The new ending better suits modern taste: Plowden goes off in a huff, unreconciled to his daughter and unmarried to Alison. With all these changes the play still has grave faults, and one will not blame, rather commend, the audiences which found it dull in 1713 and in 1730. In some ways it had in the first production an excellent chance for success. Steele gave it the puff preliminary in No. 50 of *The Guardian*, May 8.

I had just given my Orders for the Press, when my Friend Mrs. *Bicknell* made me a Visit. She came to desire I would show her the Wardrobe of the *Lizard's* (where the various Habits of the Ancestors of that Illustrious Family are preserved) in order to furnish her with a proper Dress for the *Wife of Bath*. Upon sight of the little Ruffs, she snatched one of them from the Pin, clapt it round her Neck, and turning briskly towards me, repeated a Speech out of her Part in the Comedy of that Name. If the rest of the Actors enter into their several Parts with the same Spirit, the humorous Characters of this Play cannot but appear excellent on the Theatre: For very good Judges have informed me, that the Author has drawn them with great Propriety, and an exact Observation of the Manners.

[24] See Watts, *Musical Miscellany* (1729-1731), where it is set to music by Barret.

The best actors were secured for the Drury Lane performance. One remembers that Mrs. Oldfield was not quite in a condition to act, but Mrs. Bicknell took the name part, while Wilks, Penkethman, and the two Bullocks, as well as Mrs. Porter and Mrs. Mountford, were all there.

Gay wrote to his friend Maurice Johnson on April 23 of this year telling him that his play, though put off for a week because of the popularity of *Cato,* would appear on May 5: "My play comes on 5th May. It was put off on account of Cato; so that you may easily imagine I by this time begin to be a little sensible of the approaching danger. Pray present my very humble service to your father."[25] It actually took the boards on May 12, a week later. Addison's play had been running before enthusiastic houses since April 14. Berkeley wrote to Perceval on May 7, 1713:

> Mr Addison's play has taken wonderfully, they have acted it now about a month, and would I believe act it a month longer were it not that Mrs Oldfield cannot hold out any longer, having had for several nights past, as I am informed, a midwife behind the scenes, which is surely very unbecoming the character of Cato's daughter.[26]

Men of sense must have realized that its success was largely accidental. Rowe and Pope ridiculed the whole flurry of party in their epigram, *Upon a Tory Lady who shed her Water at Cato,* and, though Gay wrote respectfully of the "universal discourse" and the "universal applause" excited by Addison's play, he must soon have realized that the play which succeeded it, good or bad, was likely to suffer injustice. It did. The *Biographia Dramatica* says *The Wife of Bath* "met with very indifferent success."[27] Gay himself spoke of it later as his

[25] John Nichols, "Antiquities in Lincolnshire," *Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica* (1790), III, xxii, Appendix to the History of the Gentlemen's Society at Spalding.

[26] *The Correspondence of Berkeley and Perceval,* ed. Benjamin Rand (Cambridge, Mass., 1914), p. 115.

[27] *Biographia Dramatica* (1812), III, 408. See also Genest, *op. cit.*, II, 514, and Leonard Welsted, *Palaemon to Caelia* (2d ed., 1717), p. 10.

> To see their first Essay the House was full;
> None fear'd a Secret to make *Chaucer* dull:
> This damn'd, absurder Projects they disclose,
> And raise preposterous Mirth from human Woes.

"damned" play, and we need not appeal the author's verdict on its reception.[28] The play ran for three nights, was withdrawn, and printed almost immediately on May 22.[29]

III

We have not yet completed the list of Gay's productions in 1713, for *The Shepherd's Week* should be added, though it was not finished and ready for publication until the following spring. Soon after Gay's return to London from Moor Park in November, he was busy on this new scheme—pastorals, but pastorals with a difference. Pope speaks of him in a facetious letter to Swift (December 8) as "an unhappy youth, who writes pastorals during the time of divine service; whose case is the more deplorable, as he hath miserably lavished away all that silver he should have reserved for his soul's health, in buttons and loops for his coat." All the young poets had tried their hands at pastoral verse, Ambrose Philips and Pope among them. Philips had run off with all the praise—at any rate in the *Guardian* papers on the subject—until Pope took a hand and in No. 40 reduced Philips's pretensions to absurdity. The squabble was amusing and may have suggested to Gay the fundamental idea for his own verses, an idea which as usual was new. Philips had attempted to introduce characters and imagery appropriate to the English scene, and Gay saw that in following this idea out to its logical extreme in burlesque there might be just cause for mirth. Of course this plan fitted in neatly with Gay's usual habit of mind; once again he could take his classical text in hand and indulge his special humor.

These two ideas, ridicule of Philips and burlesque of the *Bucolics*, were probably in Gay's mind as he began to write. It is hard at this distance to decide which predominated. I am inclined to think that the latter motive started him. After all, Pope's little tiff with Philips in the pages of *The Guardian* was all over the preceding April, months earlier than the first ref-

[28] See the letter from Gay to Swift, Nov. 9, 1729, and reply (Swift, *Letters*, IV, 108, 112).

[29] *The Guardian*, May 20 and 22, 1713. Note Gay's close association with *The Guardian* through this spring.

erences we have to Gay's plans, and since that round closed with all the counts in Pope's favor, one can hardly suppose that Pope could feel anything but amused amiability towards an opponent so delicately pricked and so skilfully counterchecked. Philips might hang up his switch at Button's if he liked, but Pope could afford to smile, since not only Philips but all the silly critics who had praised his work and neglected Pope's must now look foolish. Indeed, Pope's resentment against Philips personally, if he ever had had much, must have evaporated during the summer months, since, when he circulated his proposals for translating *Homer* in October, he entrusted Philips, then secretary of the Hanover Club, with the business of collecting subscriptions among his fellow-members. It was only much later, when Philips neglected, or—as Pope said—obstructed the progress of this design, that Pope grew angry.[30] Pope had wanted all the names of subscribers in by February 18, or thereabouts, as he proposed to print a list of them to encourage the rest of the town with the surety of final success.[31] The list of subscribers did not actually appear until May, though I doubt whether Philips's recalcitrance had much to do with the delay.[32] Pope was annoyed, however, by Philips's lack of interest, and sought to suggest that the exaggerated realism of Gay's poem was intended as a burlesque on Philips's early verses in the same kind. Pope wrote to Caryll, "It is to this management of Philips that the world owes Mr. Gay's Pastorals." Gay indeed may have encouraged Pope to think so, and in the later stages of composition he may have given certain passages in the poem a turn of direct ridicule of Philips, but since he was busy with the pastorals earlier than December 8, and since at that time Addison and Philips and the rest of Button's Club were still at least ostensibly supporting Pope's venture, it is fairly certain that in the beginning *The Shepherd's Week* was burlesque of Vergil rather than ridicule of Philips. Ruffhead admits that no one outside the immediate circle of those interested thought anything else until specially

[30] Pope to Caryll, June 8, 1714 (Pope, *Works*, VI, 210).

[31] Pope to Caryll, Jan. 9 and Feb. 25, 1714 (*ibid.*, VI, 200, 204).

[32] *Evening Post*, May 15, 1714, and Sherburn, *The Early Career of Alexander Pope*, p. 125.

enlightened.[33] We should remember that the classics in these early years held a kind of contradictory fascination for Gay's mind. He loved them, but he loved also to burlesque the self-conscious artificiality of their forms. Most of the poems we have so far discussed show this clearly. *The Shepherd's Week* was another venture of the same sort, and when Gay found he could serve his friend's interest by giving a special twist to the literary satire, he saw no reason to hesitate, particularly as he was annoyed, like Pope, by the torrent of overpraise for Philips's *Pastorals*.

The idea, however, that Gay was ridiculing Philips caught on with the minor writers, and was repeated frequently in prose and verse through the century. One versifier brings all the pastoral poets before Apollo for judgment. He insists[34] that Gay's *Shepherd's Week* was first suggested by the dispute in *The Guardian* over pastoral poetry, but he fails to see the delicate charm and irony of Gay's verses, and finally awards the palm to Pope.

> Apollo hearing Civil Wars arose,
> And Poets now began to fight in Prose,
> Declar'd, that he himself would hear the Cause,
> Himself interpret, and explain his Laws.
> In haste the summon'd Wits from *Button's* came,
> Each ready to support his Fav'rite's Claim;
> *Steele* with a *Train of ten Supporters near*,
> Forc'd to the Head, and would in Front appear,
> And *D'Urfey* with a Song brought up the Rear.
>
> The Court now sat; *Apollo* looking round,
> Many strange unpoetic Faces found,
> And asking *Prior* whence that Medley Crew,
> Whom, nor the Muses, nor his Godship knew,
> The Bard reply'd, with an *Horatian* Grin,
> *They're Wits, and have Steele's Ticket to come in.*
>
> Steele's *Ticket, cry'd the God! And is that all?*
> And so bid Critic *Dennis* clear the Hall.

[33] Owen Ruffhead, *The Life of Alexander Pope* (1769), p. 46.

[34] "The Judgment of Apollo upon the Present Set of Poets," *Poems on Several Occasions*, p. 35. The copy in the British Museum has no title page.

Dennis is too rigorous, and has to be stopped. Soon Philips appears, backed by Budgell and Tickell, offering a petition signed by twenty friends. Apollo notices that Congreve has not signed it, and calls for Pope.

> The little Bard, with Mirth and Humour fraught,
> Who neither shunn'd the Rivalship, nor sought,
> Had slunk into a Corner, as unseen,
> To Jest and Rally, with a merry *Dean;*
> But at *Apollo's* Call, (he knew his Tongue)
> He came repeating of his *Winter Song.*

Apollo approves, and

> The Cause concluded seem'd, when now began
> The gentle, cooling *Author* of the *Fan,*
> Who shall, if *Tonson* but bestow enough,
> Soon string the *Neck-Lace,* and unfold the *Muff.*
> He courted ev'ry Muse *Parnassus* knew,
> And from him, ev'ry Muse he courted, flew;
> And now repeated loud *Bowselus* Hight,
> And *Blouzelinda* in her *Apron white.*
> But soon the God, to stop the killing Lay,
> Cry'd out,—Whate'er Lord *Bolingbroke* may say,
> *Full sely are thy Sonnets, gentle* Gay.
> Then rising spoke: My Sons, your Wars forbear,
> Let Pope the Garland which he merits, wear.

He advises them all to await *Homer* with interest, not to "strain applauses for a *borrow'd Song,*" a sneer over Ambrose Philips's *Distress'd Mother,* and to be ready to praise a poet before he dies, apparently remembering Edmund Smith's chilling experiences.

The Shepherd's Week appeared on April 15, 1714,[35] pleasantly equipped with engravings, but printed in octavo, not folio size, a fact which may suggest that the author regarded his work rather as a *jeu d'esprit* than as a serious composition. He provided, however, a preface, a prologue, and notes of some interest. With a rather fine flavor of Elizabethan English in dic-

[35] *The Post-Boy,* April 15, 1714.

tion and phrasing, Gay set forth in his *Proeme* the crux of the pastoral debate. Theocritus is his model; if English dairymaids wear white aprons, then white aprons will appear in his verses. His clowns are clowns, not court-clowns, or clown-courtiers, and he lays aside all the "fine finical new-fangled fooleries of this gay Gothic garniture." Spenser is naturally in his mind, though he disapproves of the diverse grave points of churchly matter, which he thinks appertain to great clerks rather than humble poets. The point of diction bothers him; he proposes to use neither that of court nor country, neither modern nor archaic, and pleads deep learned ensamples as his excuse for so illogical a course.

The personal references and compliments scattered through the *Prologue To the Right Honourable Lord Viscount Bolingbroke* are of special interest. His references to Queen Anne are scarcely polite, so intent is he on weaving a pleasant compliment to his friend Arbuthnot. The list of fair ladies at court includes Lady Lansdowne, to whose husband Pope had just dedicated *Windsor Forest,* the Ladies Berkeley and Anglesey, friends particularly of Swift, Catharine Hyde, the Kitty who as Duchess of Queensberry was one of Gay's staunchest friends, and finally the Duchess of Montagu, daughter of Marlborough, with whose family Gay always maintained pleasant relations. Oxford appears, bearing like Moses a wand, and arranging trade treaties for the benefit of the English freemen. But St. John, "right courteous to the swain," gets the main compliments and the dedication:

> For thus he told me on a day,
> Trim are thy sonnets, gentle *Gay*,
> And certes, mirth it were to see
> Thy joyous madrigals twice three,
> With preface meet, and notes profound,
> Imprinted fair, and well y-bound.
> All suddenly then home I sped,
> And did ev'n as my Lord had said.

Some eight years later, thinking back over his friendship with

Gay in the effort to comfort the latter for his ill-success in the chase for offices, Swift wrote:

I have been considering why poets have such ill success in making their court, since they are allowed to be the greatest and best of all flatterers. The defect is, that they flatter only in print or in writing, but not by word of mouth: they will give things under their hand which they make a conscience of speaking. Besides, they are too libertine to haunt ante-chambers, too poor to bribe porters and footmen, and too proud to cringe to second-hand favourites in a great family.[36]

Then he suddenly remembered that the great men of 1714 were not pleasing persons in 1722. "Tell me, are you not under original sin by the dedication of your Eclogues to Lord Bolingbroke?"

That may have been true, but the heart of the matter more likely is that the quality of sincerity about Gay unfitted him for the party squabbles that bordered the road to preferment. For the moment the Bolingbroke dedication suited well enough. The poem was received with acclamation. Three editions appeared in 1714, two more in the author's life time,[37] besides the reprinting in the collected *Works* of 1720 and 1731, and other editions in 1742 and 1763, while Dublin printed the poem in 1728 and Edinburgh in 1760. There were a few dissenting verdicts like that in the poem already quoted. Gildon was of course scornful.

This sort of Poetry has been the Bow, in which most of our young Dablers in Rhime have try'd their Strength; but alas! not one besides Mr. *Philips* has hit the Mark, and if you compare him with the very best of *France* or *Italy*, you will easily perceive how much he has excelled them all.[38]

He seems to have been thinking of *The Shepherd's Week* when he wrote:

Another, in an abject clownish Stile,
Makes Shepherds speak a Language base and vile;
His stupid Writings most profoundly creep,

[36] Swift, *Letters*, III, 149. [37] 1721 and 1728.
[38] Charles Gildon, *Art of Poetry* (1718), I, 157.

> Barren of Wit, Provocatives of Sleep:
> You'd swear *Tom Durfey*, in his rustic Strains,
> Was Quav'ring to the Milkmaids and the Swains;
> Changing, without respect to Sound or Dress,
> *Strephon* and *Phillis*, into *Tom* and *Bess*.
> Twixt these Extremes, 'tis hard to please the Town;
> Read *Virgil*, *Spenser*, Poets of Renown,
> And equally avoid the Courtier and the Clown.[39]

Gildon, who had already in 1714 attacked Rowe and Pope, and Gay incidentally, in *The New Rehearsal*, might be expected to be scornful. He might also—since he was by no means stupid—be expected to see Gay's satirical reference to Philips, if that had been as clear as the repetitive critics of later years have imagined it. Most critics and readers found these *Eclogues* delightfully fresh in a worn-out genre. They liked the talk about Devonshire "white-pot," the breathing cows, the yellow butter and sage cheese, the smutty pipes, the country proverbs, and most of all the introduction of superstitious lore. For the first time in his verse, Gay makes use of a quality rather hard to define perhaps, a plaintive note in the pathos, which was later to win him plaudits in some of the songs in *The Beggar's Opera*. He knows the favorite songs too, and their names give a homely touch to his lines, *Gillian of Croydon*, *O'er hills and far away*, *Patient Grissel*. What happens is that the village comes to life in his verses, Hot-cockles and Blindman's-buff, the gypsies with their fortune-telling and petty thievery, the cucking-stool, the wakes, the fair with its mountebanks and tumblers and raree-shows, the funerals, the will of Blouzelinda, and the parson's platitudes:

> After the good man warn'd us from his text,
> That none could tell whose turn would be the next;
> He said, that heaven would take her soul, no doubt,
> And spoke the hour-glass in her praise—quite out.

No wonder the poem was popular! "Saturday" is surely the best, with its picture of drunken Bouzybeus among the merry reapers, singing his songs and kissing the girls.

[39] *Ibid.*, I, 156.

Down through the century the popularity of *The Shepherd's Week* increased rather than diminished. Robert Shiels (1753) thought it the best of Gay's poems.

> Of all Gay's performances, his Pastorals seem to have the highest finishing; they are perfectly Doric; the characters and dialogue are natural and rurally simple; the language is admirably suited to the persons, who appear delightfully rustic.[40]

Goldsmith thinks Gay "has hit the true spirit of pastoral poetry. In fact, he more resembles Theocritus than any other English pastoral writer whatsoever."[41] And even Johnson, in spite of his dislike of pastoral verse, admits that here the effect of reality and truth becomes conspicuous, and that these poems deserve their popularity as representations of rural manners and occupations.[42] Complimentary references multiply, especially during the seventies, when with the production for the first time of *Polly* and the printing of several editions of Gay's collected works, the reputation of Gay seems to have reached its height. William Hayward Roberts, for example, in *A Poetical Epistle to Cristopher Anstey, Esq; on the English Poets* (1773), discusses the vices of rhyme.

> No, not in rhyme. I hate that iron chain,
> Forg'd by the hand of some rude Goth, which cramps
> The fairest feather in the Muse's wing,
> And pins her to the ground.

He recognizes, however, that rhyme may be suitable for some types of verse—elegy, lyric, satire, pastoral.

[40] Theophilus Cibber, *The Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland* (1753), IV, 259.

[41] *The Beauties of English Poetry*, selected by Oliver Goldsmith (1767), I, 133. See also various other collections of this sort:

The Cabinet of Genius, containing Frontispieces and Characters adapted to the most Popular Poems (1787). This contains *Monday—Saturday* inclusive of *The Shepherd's Week*, as well as *Sweet William's Farewell*, and a half dozen of the *Fables*.

Beispielsammlung zur Theorie und Literatur der schönen Wissenschaften, von Johan Joachim Eschenburg (Berlin und Stettin, 1788). This reprints "Tuesday, or the Ditty," along with the *Verses to Lintott*, and several songs. The editor thinks Gay classical in English verse as Lafontaine in French, and discusses briefly *The Beggar's Opera*, *Polly*, and *Achilles*.

[42] Johnson, *Lives of the Poets*, ed. G. B. Hill, II, 269. See also *The Adventurer*, No. 92.

> Let rhyme supply
> The majesty of nobler sentiment,
> Which ill might suit the peasant. *Gay* felt this;
> And banish'd from his woods Arcadian swains,
> And mark'd the manners of the British hind,
> And uncouth dialect. He too could veil
> In fable's mystic garb the form of truth;
> And by his spritely tale could often draw
> The tear of laughter even from the dim eye
> Of churlish Gravity.

Imitations were frequent.[43] Indeed, the divine Bucoliast had every reason to think that he had beaten both Philips and Pope at this game, and given to the sheep and goats, the myrtle bowers and purling rivulets, a vitality that they had not known since Spenser's time.

[43] I note three:

The Courtship. A Pastoral, in Imitation of Mr. Gay. By J. W. (1748).

Four Pastorals. . . . By T. S. Esq; of the Middle Temple (1768). Pastoral II in this group is a close imitation of Gay's "Monday; or, the Squabble."

The Four Seasons of the Year, to which are added Rural Poems, and Pastoral Dialogues, Imitated from Mr. Gay, with occasional Notes and Illustrations, for the Use and Entertainment of young Gentlemen and Ladies. By Bob Short. Author of the *Country Squire*, &c, &c. (1787).

CHAPTER III

THE GREAT SCRIBLERUS

I

By the time Gay returned to London from Moor Park in November, 1713, he must have been at least vaguely aware that the time had come to choose between Cato's little senate at Button's, and the group of writers playing for Tory smiles around Swift's powerful figure. Pope was Gay's best friend at this time, and Pope, though he still dropped in occasionally at Button's, was by degrees drawing aloof from the Addison clique. Pope's position was sufficiently anomalous. His Tory friends thought he was Whig, and his Whig friends thought he was Tory. Both parties were eager to conciliate him. About this time, for example, Pope was writing to his Catholic friend Caryll that people called him Whig "because I have been honoured with Mr. Addison's good word, and Mr. Jervas's good deeds, and of late with my Lord Halifax's patronage."[1] He was closely associated with Steele on *The Guardian,* and even Swift, who knew him so well, apparently continued through 1715 to think of him as a Whig. ". . . but you must give me leave to add one thing, that you talk at your ease, being wholly unconcerned in public events: for, if your friends the Whigs continue, you may hope for some favour; if the Tories return, you are at least sure of quiet."[2]

Addison, on the other hand, was annoyed by a number of Pope's literary escapades that year, especially his supposed share in writing the pretty epigram about the Tory lady's behavior at *Cato* and his known authorship of the *Narrative of Dr. Robert Norris,* and thought apparently that Pope and Gay were helping with some *Examiner* papers.[3] In any case, the relations

[1] Pope, *Works,* VI, 208. [2] Swift, *Letters,* II, 286.

[3] John Dennis, *A True Character of Mr. Pope* (1716); Joseph Warton, *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope* (5th ed., 1806), II, 234.

between Pope and Addison were getting more and more strained, and Gay, who seems—like most people—to have respected, but never heartily liked, Addison, leaned more and more towards Pope's side in the quarrel. Though politics were in the first place irrelevant in this division of the wits, it seemed inevitable that the two friends should find themselves more and more closely aligned with Swift and Arbuthnot and the Tory group.

Gildon's fanciful description in *A New Rehearsal* (1714) puts the situation in which Pope and Gay found themselves without much distortion in spite of his animus. Sawny Dapper is speaking—presumably Pope, "A young Poet of the Modern Stamp, an easy Versifyer, Conceited and a Contemner secretly of all others."

> You must know that there are two Parties of *Wits*, and two or three Men at the Head of them. Now I first fixt myself on the good Nature and easy Temper (by my Application) of the Men of real Merit, they cry'd me up, recommended me to the Town, and the Town took their Words, and so I set up for myself; for you must know, they can't so easily destroy a Man's Reputation, as make it; then I gave my Approbation of the Works of the Heads of the other Party, that is of those that have Vogue and no Merit; by this means I gain'd all their Friends, and bring those I approve, to a sort of Dependance upon me.[4]

Gay and Pope were drifting away from one party and into the arms of the other. Pope, who knew both Arbuthnot and Swift well by the end of 1712, was willing to praise Granville and the Tories in *Windsor Forest* in March, 1713. Somewhat earlier (January 15), Gay also in *Rural Sports* had pleasant words for the government and for Queen Anne, "who binds the Tyrant War in chains." Pope's letter to Gay of October 23, 1713, shows that the two friends had a special literary scheme ready for exploitation, and that for collaboration they had approached not Addison and Steele, but Swift and Parnell. Neither of them was genuinely interested in politics, but Pope was eager for literary reputation, and Swift's enthusiastic support of the

[4] [Charles Gildon], *A New Rehearsal, or Bays the Younger* (1714), pp. 45-46.

From a series of drawings by "Old" Laroon, engraved by Pierce Tempest, and first published with the title of "Cryes of the City of London" in 1688. Courtesy of the British Museum

Homer project (October, 1713) won him completely, while Gay, no doubt anxious for fame too, was even more determined to secure the independence of a government post, not an unusual aspiration for a smart young writer in those days. The die was cast (perhaps in the form of *Examiners*) in the spring of 1713, and when Gay returned to town in November, he soon found himself merged with the Tory group and before very long secretary at the deliberations of Scriblerus.

Gossip paints some pretty pictures of the friends at this time. Swift, Gay, Bolingbroke, and even Steele haunted the streets and loved to patronize the ballad singers. Pope himself condescended to write an epitaph for one of them.

> She who is laid beneath this sod of earth
> Was blest, though wanting titles, power, and birth;
> Though poor, had yet the loftiest bards inspir'd;
> Though fair, was yet by her own sex admir'd;
> But Wortley was the woman that did praise,
> And Swift and Gay the bards that lov'd her lays.
> Clarinda, courted by the wise and great,
> Would stay to charm the vulgar at their gate;
> Pleas'd if those notes which lords & poets lov'd,
> Were by the humble peasant-throng approv'd.

Swift is reported to have sent many a song into the world through the medium of the ballad singers, notably a severe satire on the Duke of Marlborough, "Our Johnny is come from the wars." Bolingbroke's Clara was the original singer of "Black-ey'd Susan" and of one or two songs which were afterwards introduced into *The Beggar's Opera,* and is said to have had a remarkable sweetness and pathos in her tones.[5]

Gay with his songs and his flute was fond of this low company. His exuberance of spirits, his joy in living, his interest in all kinds of people and scenes were not alone responsible for taking him down among these people and encouraging their activities. The ballad singers had a humble share also in influencing public opinion in those days; their songs smacked strongly of either politics or murder. *The Weekly Journal, or*

[5] Richard Ryan, *Poetry and Poets* (1826), II, 89-91.

Saturday's Post for June 29, 1723, gives evidence of the rabid party feelings they were apt to generate:

> Some Ballad-Singers being got together in Grace-Church-Street, were singing very melodiously to a Fiddle, a very loyal Song or Ballad in Praise of King George; but the Tune being the same that they sing to an old Ballad, called, *The King shall enjoy his own again,* an honest grave Shopkeeper, not hearing the Words so plain as he did the Tune, fell in a most grievous Passion at the poor Singers, told them their King was a Papist, and a Run-a-gate; that he was a Son of a Whore, and they were all Rogues that were for him. Upon this the Mob gathered about him, and threatened to take him up: Yes, yes, says the good Shop-Keeper, I'll give you enough of taking up, presently, and immediately fetches a Constable; but when the Midnight Magistrate had enquired into the Matter, and was inform'd that the Ballad they were singing was a very loyal Ballad, and in Praise of King George, the Man turn'd Pale, and began to Smell; upon which the Constable convey'd him home, that he might examine his lower Parts, and rectify the Disorder, which the Fright had brought upon him.

This street propaganda was part of the game of politics in 1713. Swift's methods, as chief literary whip of his party, were by no means so sedate as Addison's; he set up no coffee-house, and preferred to work without the blare of trumpets. Gay's abilities and temper were particularly suitable for his purposes. A long and rather cumbersome allegorical poem on politics, which was written probably by Gay,[6] *Yarhell's Kitchen: or, the Dogs of Egypt* (1713), opens with some lines which suggest aptly enough the opportunity afforded by these crude singers for spreading propaganda.

> I am the Bard; who whilom did rehearse
> Pathetick Tales of Love in humble Verse:
> Who Solemn Hymns compos'd for Raree Shows;
> And *Ghosts* and *Goblins* feign'd in tuneful Prose:
> Who oft have made judicious Mobs rejoice,
> Attentive to the Ragged *Siren's* Voice:
> Works grateful unto Hawking Dames.—

[6] Mr. Faber attributes this work to Prior. His reasons appear insufficient. See *The Poetical Works of John Gay,* p. xxxii.

But now the *Muse* bids strike a higher String,
In peerless Numbers now—*Arms, and the Man I sing.*

The lines suggest also something of the way in which Gay served his apprenticeship to letters and acquired that control over easy-flowing verses which was his with the publication of *Rural Sports.*

Swift was working his literary friends hard during this winter of 1713-1714.

Or, Have you nothing new today
From Pope, from Parnell, or from Gay?

he asks in *An Imitation of the Sixth Satire of the Second Book of Horace . . . The first Part done in the Year 1714.* Ford, Swift's Irish friend, was frequently one of the group; and Parnell, who followed Swift to London in 1711, was from time to time publishing poems which tied the bonds of the fellowship more firmly, once by flattery of St. John in *An Essay on the Different Styles of Poetry*[7] (March 24, 1713) and once by discrediting Dennis and Philips in *The Bookworm* (April, 1714). His friendship with Lewis, Ford, Swift, and Berkeley was of some standing, and he had much influence in drawing Pope and Gay over into that circle. Pope was the one whom they all petted. Fortescue once wrote to Gay a letter in the form of a dream, describing a journey with his friend to Parnassus. He apparently alluded to Pope when he said he saw "a young person of a small stature, but great sweetness and vivacity in his looks, sitting with nine beautiful maids dancing round him; Criticism stood at his right, and Pastoral on his left; he was crowned with laurels and seemed the Genius of the place."[8]

Pope and Parnell were working together at Binfield in the spring of 1714 on the *Homer* project, and Pope wrote in to Gay asking him to convey his service to all these London friends:

Pray give, with the utmost fidelity and esteem, my hearty service to the Dean, Dr. Arbuthnot, Mr. Ford, and to Mr. Fortescue. Let

[7] Swift, *Journal to Stella*, p. 530. "Mightily esteemed, but poetry sells ill."
[8] See Christie's *Sale Catalogue* for June 4, 1896.

them also know at Button's that I am mindful of them. I am, divine Bucoliast!

Thy loving Countryman.[9]

It is the "utmost fidelity" that Pope sends to Swift; he is by this time merely "mindful of" Addison, and there seems to be almost a double edge to the phrase, especially when followed so closely by the compliment to Gay and his recently published *Shepherd's Week.*

Pope's idea for the *Works of the Unlearned* soon got the approval of this group. Swift and Parnell and Gay all liked it.[10] Arbuthnot also approved, and it was his final suggestion that redirected the energies of the group into the *Memoirs of Scriblerus.* The story of the Scriblerus Club has been frequently told.[11] The Club must have started shortly after Gay's return from the country in November, 1713. Pope had already been confiding to him his plans for some such co-operative writing, and in that letter (October 23) the idea was to publish a monthly journal called *The Works of the Unlearned* (in ridicule of the well-known critical review with a similar name), in which "whatever book appears that deserves praise, shall be depreciated ironically, and in the same manner that modern critics take to undervalue works of value, and to commend the high productions of Grub-street."[12] Pope was hot with the idea and managed to communicate his enthusiasm to the others. Arbuthnot caught the ball, and changed the rules of the game, as becomes clear from Spence's statement of the Club's purpose, "to ridicule all the false tastes in learning under the character of a man of capacity enough, that had dipped into every art and science, but injudiciously in each." It was to be ridicule of pedantry then, that would focus the discussions and writing of the group, whether the pedantic dunces applied their efforts to poetry, learning, natural philosophy, medicine, or the law. Arbuthnot was in the end more interested than any of them, and the list of notes that he submits for Swift's inspection will

[9] Pope, *Works,* VII, 415. [10] *Ibid.,* VII, 412.
[11] Never better than by Sherburn, *The Early Career of Alexander Pope,* pp. 69-82.
[12] Pope, *Works,* VII, 412.

give a good idea of his notion of the scope of Martin's adventures and the type of satire involved.

Pray, remember Martin, who is an innocent fellow and will not disturb your solitude. The ridicule of medicine is so copious a subject that I must only here and there touch it. I have made him study physic from the apothecary's bill, where there is a good plentiful field for a satire upon the present practice. One of his projects was, by a stamp upon blistering-plasters, and melilot by the yard, to raise money for the Government, and to give it to Radcliffe and others to farm. But there was likely to be a petition from the inhabitants of London and Westminster, who had no mind to be flayed. There was a problem about the doses of purging medicines published four years ago, showing that they ought to be in proportion to the bulk of the patient. From thence Martin endeavours to determine the question about the weight of the ancient men, by the doses of physic that were given them. . . . Pope has been collecting high flights of poetry, which are very good; they are to be solemn nonsense.[13]

Swift seems very modest about his own share in the productions of the Club, especially when one remembers his early ridicule of dunces in *A Tale of a Tub* and *The Battle of the Books;* he writes to Arbuthnot on July 3:

To talk of Martin in any hands but yours, is a folly. You every day give better hints than all of us together could do in a twelvemonth; and to say the truth, Pope who first thought of the hint has no genius at all to it in my mind. Gay is too young; Parnell has some ideas of it, but is idle; I could put together, and lard, and strike out well enough, but all that relates to the sciences must be from you.[14]

His remark about Gay is curious, since Gay was three years older than Pope. Gay is noted in several places as secretary to Martinus Scriblerus, but probably looked upon the foregatherings of the Club as of social rather than literary interest, and his contributions at this time seem to have been frivolous, with the exception, possibly, of the *Memoirs of P. P. Clerk of this Parish*, a satire on Bishop Burnet written by Pope and Gay

[13] The entire letter should be read (Swift, *Letters*, II, 158-160).
[14] *Ibid.*, II, 162.

probably in 1715.[15] When clouds of Grub Street wasps settled down on Pope in 1728, this pamphlet came up for attention, and Gay got some of the stings also. At that time the enemy was vague about the authorship of the *Parish Clerk* piece. One writer in *The Daily Journal* (April 3) states that it had been owned about two years ago by Mr. S(mith), whoever that may have been. Another in a letter to the author of the same journal complains of its scurrility.[16]

I shall therefore waive this and other little Subtleties, not unworthy the Reporters of the Case of *Stradlyng* and *Stiles*, and observe, that the Piece which the Company seems to have been in so much pain about, *viz. The Memoirs of a Parish Clerk*, was a very dull and unjust Abuse of an excellent Person, who wrote in Defence of our Religion and Constitution, and who has been dead many Years. These *Memoirs*, when they were first handed about in Manuscript, gave so general an Offence, that so far from any Fear of their being robbed of them, it was generally expected that a certain Led Poet, maintain'd by the *Company* for that Purpose, would be order'd to *own* them.

Certainly many of the topics chosen by the group for witty extravaganzas were of the sort which for one reason or other could profitably remain unprinted, for the edification of a limited circle only. Some pretty sports of this sort were never published; many even of the more important items waited till 1741 for printing, while others crept into print surreptitiously to leave sober biographers guessing at authorship, or tossing the scatalogical tidbits from one member of the group to another. The key-tone of their efforts was fantasticality, and when Whiston and Ditton proposed in utter seriousness their absurd scheme for ascertaining the longitude, Arbuthnot was aggrieved because

[15] Sherburn, *The Early Career of Alexander Pope*, p. 81. See *Letters of Mr. Alexander Pope, And Several of his Friends* (1737-1741). The second volume prints a number of the *Scriblerus* tracts, and with them the following advertisement: "*The Treatise of the* Art of Sinking, *and* Virgilius Restauratus, *were written between our Author and Dr.* Arbuthnot; *Dr.* Parnelle *had a hand in that of the Origine of Sciences; Mr.* Gay *in the Memoirs of a Parish-Clerk, and two of the Guardians.*"

[16] *A Compleat Collection Of all the Verses, Essays, Letters, and Advertisements, which Have been occasioned by the Publication of Three Volumes of Miscellanies, by Pope and Company* (1728), pp. 9, 20.

they had spoiled a pleasant idea which he had intended to interweave in the Scriblerus mesh.[17] Some irreverent member of the group, possibly Gay, later suggested the obvious rhymes for Whiston and Ditton and produced *The Ode on the Longitude*.[18] Whiston had long been a frequenter of Will's coffeehouse, and Pope and Gay and the others had many times found it necessary to fly from his ponderous lucubrations on boundless space to the unpretentious nonsense of Titcombe, the humour of Steele, or even the "insignificant observations and quirks of grammar of Mr. C[romwell] and D[ennis]."[19] And now in this group of friends on the lookout for absurdities and themselves not afraid to be absurd, the idea of his great Pacific and Atlantic lighthouses received the treatment it certainly merited.

One would have expected that Berkeley's scheme for a missionary college in Bermuda would stand in grave danger of similar treatment, and apparently at one time the subject came up as appropriate for Scriblerian discussion. Joseph Warton tells the story, as he heard it from Lord Bathurst.

> Lord Bathurst told me, that the members of the *Scriblerus Club*, being met at his house at dinner, they agreed to rally Berkeley, who was also his guest, on his scheme at Bermudas. Berkeley, having listened to the many lively things they had to say, begged to be heard in his turn; and displayed his plan with such an astonishing and animating force of eloquence and enthusiasm, that they were struck dumb, and, after some pause, rose up all together with earnestness, exclaiming, "Let us set out with him immediately."[20]

All this sounds rather formidable; many of us might well feel shy in the company of the men whose stored-up acidities would before long bring forth *Gulliver's Travels* and *The Dunciad*, and we might expect our dull platitudes and even our

[17] Swift, *Letters*, II, 186.

[18] Pope attributed this to Gay (Spence, *Anecdotes*, ed. S. W. Singer, 1820, p. 201). See Gay to Caryll, April, 1715 (Pope, *Works*, VI, 226-227).

[19] Pope to Caryll, Aug. 14, 1713 (*ibid.*, VI, 190).

[20] Joseph Warton, *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope* (5th ed., 1806), II, 199 n. This meeting must have taken place between 1724, when Berkeley began his agitation for the scheme, and 1728, when he left for America.

enthusiasms to be treated with scant respect. It is perhaps well to emphasize the fact that bitter ridicule was not the tone of this company. Whiston and Woodward, Bentley and Theobald and the Grub Street versifiers suffered harsh treatment perhaps, but generally their weaknesses were made amusing, to everybody but themselves. Swift's favorite phrase caught on, *vive la bagatelle*. They delighted in doggerel and obscenities, and particularly in pricking the bubble of false pretension wherever it slyly started its flight above the heads of men. Goldsmith's account of Parnell's happy relations with the group is worth quoting once again:

> The friends, to whom, during the latter part of his life, he was chiefly attached, were Pope, Swift, Arbuthnot, Jervas, and Gay. Among these he was particularly happy, his mind was entirely at ease, and gave a loose to every harmless folly that came uppermost. Indeed it was a society, in which, of all others, a wise man might be most foolish without incurring any danger of contempt.[21]

That Gay contributed his share to the foolishness is evident from some of the doggerel verses he wrote for meetings of the Club.

> An Answer
> *Written by Gay*
> Backstairs, St. James's Palace,
> Past eight, *April* 14, 1714.
>
> In a summons so large, which all clergy contains,
> I must turn Dismal's convert, or part with my brains,
> Should I scruple to quit the Back-stairs for your blind ones,
> Or refuse your true junto for one of—[22]

The junto consisted of the big five, that is, Swift, Arbuthnot, Pope, Gay, and Parnell, with Oxford as patron. No doubt others were interested and may have attended occasionally. Edward Harley, Oxford's son, writes in 1726 as if his intimacy with the group were early:

> Now you three are together, I often think of the lines wrote in old times which begin,
>
> The Doctor and Dean, Pope, Parnell, and Gay.

[21] Goldsmith, *The Life of Thomas Parnell, D.D.* (1770), p. 24.
[22] Swift, *Letters*, II, 417.

Only poor Parnell is gone; and I regret him the less because, by being the editor of his poems, you had an opportunity of making the finest copy of verses, and the greatest compliment, that ever was paid by a poet to any man.[23]

The line quoted is from an invitation Swift penned to the Earl of Oxford to attend a meeting of the Club.

Gay's friend Fortescue helped with some of the legal technicalities, notably in *Stradlyng versus Stiles*, and seems to have slipped into some of their ways of thinking, if one may judge by a letter Fortescue wrote much later to Mrs. Howard:

With this you will receive the History of the Sevarambi, which I promised your ladyship. It is a constitution of government quite different from any that hath yet appeared in the world, and I think much the best. By that only instance of making money of no use either to the necessities or pleasure of life, what a train of evils are at once prevented? and how happy, of course, must a people be, where doing good, and loving their country are the only means of esteem and preferment?[24]

The Club was particularly active from February to June of 1714.[25] By June, dissension had broken the Tory ranks, Oxford and Bolingbroke were at swords' points, Swift had retired to Letcombe in despair, Gay was preparing to go to Hanover with the Clarendon embassy, Pope and Parnell had drifted back to Binfield to work on *Homer*. The last meeting of the Club was on June 5, as Arbuthnot reported to Swift,[26] unless one calls the foregathering of Pope and Parnell with Swift at Letcombe in early July a meeting. Pope wrote to Arbuthnot after this visit: "This is not a time for us to make others live, when we can hardly live ourselves; so Scriblerus, contrary to other maggots, must lie dead all the summer, and wait till winter shall revive him."[27]

On August 1 the Queen died; her Tory government collapsed, so that when Pope and Parnell wrote a combination

[23] Pope, *Works*, VIII, 224-225.

[24] *Letters to and from Henrietta, Countess of Suffolk, and her second husband, the Hon. George Berkeley*, ed. John Wilson Croker (1824), I, 202.

[25] Congreve, Atterbury, Addison, Anthony Henley, are all named as members of the Club in Spence, *Anecdotes*, pp. 10-11.

[26] Swift, *Letters*, II, 151.

[27] Pope, *Works*, VII, 468.

letter to Arbuthnot on September 2, nothing but the shadow of the old glory remained:

> It is a pleasure to us to recollect the satisfaction we enjoyed in your company, when we used to meet the dean and Gay with you; and greatness itself condescended to look in at the door to us. Then it was that the immortal Scriblerus smiled upon our endeavours, who now hangs his head in an obscure corner, pining for his friends that are scattering over the face of the earth.[28]

II

The year 1714 was not a good one for Gay. *The Shepherd's Week* was the only considerable poem to his credit and that, one feels, was a delayed blossom of the previous year's inspiration. He was perhaps somewhat overcome by his own social success, and worried about the means to maintain himself in such distinguished society. Swift, who was with him during these months and then not again until 1726, remembered later all too clearly his talk about his own necessities. The Duchess of Monmouth's secretary, who had somehow maneuvered his way to the backstairs of St. James's, might easily find himself embarrassed. An office must be found. Later critics have apparently seen reason for offence in this effort of Gay's to secure political preferment. On the contrary, having once left the shop for the world of letters, Gay had no further choice. The patron's day was largely over; the politician for the time being took his place, and could not be ignored, unless one had both great genius and great skill in self-advertisement. Even Pope might look sidewise at a pension, and it is hardly worth while to rehearse the list of Augustan writers with the names of their offices beside them. Gay's comparative lack of success seems to have made him contemptible to some minds.

At any rate, by June, 1714, his first office was ready for him. In their effort to play the popular double game, Harley's government was at this time preparing a mission to Hanover under Lord Clarendon in an effort to convince the Elector that after all the Tories might be trusted. Clarendon was not a

[28] *Ibid.*, VII, 471. The extract is from Parnell's section of the letter.

happy choice. He had already served as governor of New York, and had there—it is said—astonished the natives by appearing in state functions dressed as a woman to represent the Queen more exactly. Gay was to be his secretary, and Parnell—another Scriblerian—his chaplain. At the last moment Parnell failed to get this post, but Gay's appointment was secure. He wrote a proper and no doubt sincere letter of thanks to Swift, to whom, along with Arbuthnot and Erasmus Lewis, he felt he owed his success, and then resigned his place with the Duchess of Monmouth.[29] Barber, Swift's printer, found him well pleased with his promotion.[30]

Before writing to Swift on June 8, Gay had already addressed an appeal for funds to Oxford; it was—quite properly from a fellow-member of the Scriblerus Club and the author of *The Shepherd's Week*—an *Epigrammatical Petition of your Lordship's most humble servant, John Gay.*

I'm no more to converse with the swains,
But go where fine people resort;
One can live without money on plains,
But never without it at court.

Yet if when with swains I did gambol,
I array'd me in silver and blue
When abroad and in courts I shall ramble,
Pray, my Lord, how much money will do?

On June 10 he was again writing to Oxford to remind him of his shepherd's petition and give him details of his plans.[31] Finally the money was ready, and Gay set off happy on the fourteenth, bearing with him the £100 on his back and Swift's budget of good advice in his pocket.[32] He was still on the *Henrietta* in Margett Road on June 27, a trifle seasick and waiting for fair winds. The Lady Theodosia, Clarendon's daughter, had left them the day before.[33] Apparently eleven days were

[29] Swift, *Letters*, II, 144. [30] *Ibid.*, II, 146.

[31] Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Portland MSS* (1899), V, 457. See also Arbuthnot's letter to Swift (Swift, *Letters*, II, 151).

[32] Swift, *Letters* II, 149-150.

[33] *The Letters of Jonathan Swift to Charles Ford*, ed. Nichol Smith (Oxford, 1935), p. 221. I have been unable to trace this letter.

passed on shipboard. He writes Ford from The Hague on Tuesday, July 6, that he had arrived Sunday evening from Rotterdam, and was not allowing diplomatic duties to interfere with his enjoyment of the ladies. He suggests that Ford will do well to visit Binfield and, while Pope and Parnell are busy making a Grecian campaign, he can meet his Venus in the wood and know her by her locks like Aeneas or Lord Petre.[34] The party left for Hanover on July 8.

These two letters to Ford, one more dated August 7, and a later one to Arbuthnot dated August 16, are the only letters of Gay that survive from the time of his Hanoverian expedition. Evidently he wrote to Erasmus Lewis,[35] but Lewis's papers were all destroyed when the crash came on August 1, and Gay's letter or letters disappeared with the rest. Arbuthnot wrote to Swift on August 2 and mentioned that he had heard from Gay just before the Queen's death (August 1), and that Gay had asked for copies of his own poems to be sent to Hanover, as the Princess Caroline wanted to see them. "Is he not a true poet, who had not one of his own books to give to the Princess, that asked for one?"[36]

The request for poems was not a laughing matter and was repeated in a letter to Ford, dated August 7.[37] Gay wanted three or four copies of *The Shepherd's Week* with as many of *The Fan*. He complains of the monotony of court life at Herrenhausen, but seems well satisfied with his reception, and particularly with the kindness of the Princess and her lady-in-waiting, the Countess of Piquebourg. The ladies probably found his company much more agreeable than Clarendon's and flattered him by supposing that he would stay on at Hanover as English resident after Lord Clarendon's departure and also by subscribing to Pope's *Homer* on his recommendation.

On August 16, Gay wrote a letter with the vague superscription "For Dr. Arbuthnot or the Dean of St. Patrick's." This was largely an answer to Swift's letter of June 12, though it doubtless found its way to Arbuthnot first, as Swift left for

[34] *Ibid.*, pp. 221-222.
[35] Swift, *Letters*, II, 176.
[36] *Ibid.*, II, 233.
[37] *Letters of Swift to Ford*, p. 222.

Dublin on the day that Gay's letter was written. It consists largely of fanciful suggestions for a manual for young diplomats and politicians, and reminds us that Gay had not yet forgotten the fortunes of Scriblerus.[38]

To be secretary to Martin, and to no one of more worldly importance, Gay now returned to London.[39] The mission he had served was utterly discredited by the death of the Queen, and nothing remained of his dreams of greatness but the hope that the Princess might remember him when she came to England. Pope knew of his discomfiture by September 2, though Gay had not as yet arrived in England. Three weeks later, Pope wrote from Bath—where he and Parnell were enjoying a well-earned holiday—a long letter of welcome, assuring Gay of the genuineness of his friendship, inviting him to Bath, to Binfield, wherever, in the most generous spirit. He is keen to know Gay's principles, and suggests that Gay should treat his recent employment by the Tories as a temporary aberration.

> If you are a tory, or thought so by any man, I know it can proceed from nothing but your gratitude to a few people who endeavoured to serve you, and whose politics were never your concern. If you are a whig, as I rather hope, and as I think your principles and mine, as brother poets, had ever a bias to the side of liberty, I know you will be an honest man, and an inoffensive one. Upon the whole, I know you are incapable of being so much of either party as to be good for nothing.[40]

He is rather heavily facetious about Gay's interest in the women, and ends his letter by recommending that Gay "write something on the king, or prince, or princess." This suggestion was not very striking or original. Arbuthnot had already offered the same idea; only he made it more definite and possible. He wrote to Swift, October 19, 1714:

> I advised him to make a poem upon the Princess before she came over, describing her to the English ladies; for it seems the

[38] Swift, *Letters*, II, 218-220. It is probable that Gay wrote several letters of this combination type from Hanover. Bolingbroke refers to one such in a letter to Swift, dated Aug. 3: "Pope has sent me a letter from Gay: being learned in geography, he took Binfield to be the ready way from Hanover to Whitehall" (*ibid.*, II, 214).

[39] Pope to Arbuthnot, Sept. 2, 1714 (Pope, *Works*, VII, 472).

[40] *Ibid.*, VII, 415.

Princess does not dislike that—she is really a person that I believe will give great content to everybody. But Gay was in such a grovelling condition, as to the affairs of the world, that his Muse would not stoop to visit him.[41]

Gay had no doubt been playing with the idea for some weeks. Things looked desperate enough for him when he had that conversation with Arbuthnot. He had refused Pope's invitation, probably feeling that he must be in London to await the arrival of the Princess. She came on October 13 and made a pleasant impression on most people. Still the poem was not ready, and its final appearance was due not to the suggestions of Pope or Arbuthnot, but to the pleasantly teasing importunity of the Princess herself.

> Madam, to all your censures I submit,
> And frankly own I should long since have writ:
> You told me, silence would be thought a crime,
> And kindly strove to teaze me into rhyme:
> No more let trifling themes your Muse employ,
> Nor lavish verse to paint a female toy;
> No more on plains with rural damsels sport,
> But sing the glories of the *British* court.

One quality which still gives this poem a quiet charm is the delightful informality with which Gay traces the various stages in the composition. He makes the poem a record of the writer's pains. The opening lines set the correct conversational pace; then he varies this with a sly burlesque of the usual type of flamboyant ode, feels the lack of pattern, reads the critics and peruses model verses, and finally adopts Arbuthnot's notion of describing the Princess for the English ladies. Unfortunately, he finds his graceful compliments interrupted by the actual arrival of the lady.

> Since all my schemes were baulk'd, my last resort,
> I left the Muses to frequent the Court;

[41] Swift, *Letters*, II, 247. This suggestion must have been made at least two weeks before the date of this letter, since the Princess landed at Margate, Oct. 13, 1714.

Pensive each night, from room to room I walk'd,
To one I bow'd, and with another talk'd;
Enquir'd what news, or such a Lady's name,
And did the next day, and the next, the same.
Places, I found, were daily giv'n away,
And yet no friendly Gazette mention'd *Gay*.

Presently he forgets the personal grievance and turns to flattering epigram, praising one last time the royal family, the security they bring with them, the far-flung fleets of Britain, and the commerce of the Empire.

Obviously he feels the need for a pattern into which to fit his ideas, but for our part as readers we are grateful for the lack of plan; the verses have something of the quality of Pope's later style, of the *sermo pedestris*, and it is pleasant to know that people liked the poem well enough to demand four separate editions almost at once and a fifth along with *The Epistle to Burlington* a year or two later. *The Daily Courant* for November 11, 1714, announced the publication of the poem as *A Letter to a Lady, occasioned by the Arrival of Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales*. Lintot paid Gay £5 7*s*. 6*d*. for the copyright. Pope sent a copy at once to Martha Blount, refusing to allow any idealization of the dear Princess—"She is very fat. God help her husband."[42] Gay himself sent one to Caryll, whose kind invitation to Ladyholt had necessarily been refused the preceding June.[43]

Much of Gay's time during the late months of 1714 was evidently passed in cultivating his court acquaintance. The Princess continued kind, and she and her husband attended the first night (February 23) of Gay's next play, *The What d'ye Call It*. She had gathered about her, quite unconscious of contrasts, a group of altogether charming and beautiful ladies-in-waiting—Molly Lepel, Madge and Mary Bellenden, Sophie Howe, Miss Griffin, Henrietta Howard, the sage and serious Miss Meadows —and these were beginning to grow fond of Gay, and to befriend him when he needed their kind attentions. No places at

[42] Pope, *Works*, IX, 256. [43] *Ibid.*, VI, 221.

Court were as yet found for him, however, as he lugubriously confesses in a letter to Ford on December 30.[44]

At this time he was dividing his energies between social gaiety and writing. He quotes in this letter freely from a new poem, *Trivia*, then on the stocks but not to be printed for another year. He does not mention *The What d'ye Call It*, though that play was actually produced at Drury Lane on February 23, 1715. The neglect seems odd, as there are several items of literary gossip in the letter, and one would expect him to mention the work he had in hand. Pope, he says, has been in the country, but will be in town this week to forward the printing of his *Homer*, already begun.[45] If the two friends collaborated on this play, as Button's crowd insinuated, they must have done the work rapidly. Is it not probable that some of those high flights of poetry, solemn nonsense, which Pope had been collecting as early as June of 1714,[46] went into the making of this play (to appear later in disguise in *The Art of Sinking in Poetry*), and that this assistance not only markedly shortened Gay's labors in composition, but also gave rise—since Gay was invariably frank and generous about such matters—to exaggerated reports of his indebtedness? This theory would explain also the large emphasis in Gay's satire on the work of Philips and Addison, since Pope was at this time tightening his belt for the squabble with Addison and his clique over Tickell's competitive *Homer*. During the spring of 1714, moreover, while the Scriblerus Club was holding frequent meetings and pitchforking absurdities high in the air for laughter, Gay was working on a burlesque which on Pope's advice he did not at that time publish. Pope writes on May 4 to report progress on *Homer* and suggests facetiously that his own aspect has become severe from deep meditation on high subjects, "equal to the formidable front of black-browed Jupiter."

[44] This letter may be found in the R. B. Adam Collection deposited in the library of the University of Rochester.

[45] Pope was in Binfield on Oct. 26 (Pope, *Works*, VI, 220), planned to go to London a week later, and spend two or three weeks "to set Homer forwards in the press." He was still in London on Nov. 19.

[46] Swift, *Letters*, II, 160.

In a word, Y[oun]g himself has not acquired more tragic majesty in his aspect by reading his own verses, than I by Homer's. In this state I cannot consent to your publication of that ludicrous trifling burlesque you write about. Dr. Parnell also joins me in my opinion, that it will by no means be well to print it.[47]

I emphasize the context here. As he writes, Pope is thinking of the task he himself is most concerned with at the moment, the translation of *Homer*. He knows from personal experience how easily high seriousness may degenerate into bombast. Young and the absurdity of some of his passion-tattered verses drift across his mind, and then Gay's burlesque. Now if that burlesque he writes about were *The What d'ye Call It* with its ridicule not only of Young, but of Addison and Philips, there was very good reason at that time, when Pope wanted general support of his own great project, to deprecate publication. Later, when Pope came up to town early in the New Year, angry with the knowledge of the Button's plot against him, might he not have encouraged Gay not only to publish but to produce the farce, even have aided him by suggesting this or that passage in well-known plays for parody? This hypothesis would account for Gay's failure to mention his play to Ford on December 30 and for the speed with which the production was actually whipped into shape for the Drury Lane performance. It would also make this farce Gay's first and most distinguished contribution to the lucubrations of Martinus Scriblerus.

For there certainly was an impression—a backwash in part no doubt of the gossip about *Three Hours after Marriage*—that Pope helped Gay with *The What d'ye Call It*. The *Biographia Dramatica* states soberly: "Mr. Pope, who is suspected to have afforded some assistance to his friend Gay in the composition of this piece, gives the following account of its reception. . . ."[48] Cibber says something of the same sort in *A Letter from Mr. Cibber to Mr. Pope* (1742),[49] and makes his charge more definite in a statement to Spence.[50]

[47] Pope, *Works*, VII, 415.

[48] *Biographia Dramatica* (1812), III, 399. This remark does not occur in earlier editions.

[49] P. 21.

[50] Spence, *Anecdotes*, p. 348.

Mr. Pope brought some of the "What d'ye call it," in his own handwriting to Cibber, the part about the miscarriage in particular, but not much beside. When it was read to the players, Mr. Pope read it, though Gay was by.—Gay always used to read his own plays. After this, upon seeing a knife with the name of J. Gay upon it, Cibber said; "What, does Mr. Pope make knives too?"

Of this it needs to be said that the statement was made long after the event, that the handwriting item is introduced generally, then hastily qualified to the part about the miscarriage and that only, and that Gay in 1715 could scarcely have been said to have developed any "habits" in producing plays at all, since *The Wife of Bath* had been his only previous experience. *The What d'ye Call It* and *Three Hours after Marriage* were useful to many an argument of Pope's enemies, and the more responsible he could be made for both plays, the better they liked it. Pope was quick to correct the authors of *A Complete Key to the last New Farce* and to point out that the speech of Peascod—"When I am dead you'll bind my grave with wicker" —does not refer to a couplet in Banks's *Earl of Essex*, as the pamphlet had suggested, but is really a burlesque of the passage in *Cato* where the hero says of his son, "When I am dead, be sure thou place his urn near mine."[51] Pope may well have thought of the fun of introducing ghosts in the part about the miscarriage; indeed, a passage calling for ghosts in the preliminary scene has an interpolative look, but apart from minor points of this kind and the suggested examples of bathos from Pope's collection, the play is Gay's quite as much as anything can be anybody's which came from this group of friends in this highly co-operative period of composition. Tricks of style crop up that are unmistakably his, such for example as the reversal of substantives in the song:

> Ye goblins and fairys
> With frisks and vagarys . . .

a trick that he had been using about the same time absurdly (but amusingly, be it remembered, for the verses should be

[51] Pope, *Works*, VI, 225 n.

read aloud and rapidly) in *An Ode on the Longitude.* Some of the old phrases used for burlesque purposes in *The Shepherd's Week* are made up for duty again in this play. Compare the "O rueful day—O woeful day!" in the farewell scene between Kitty and Filbert with its counterpart in "Thursday."[52] The same tendency to look back to Shakespeare for inspiration is evident here, as in *The Mohocks* and *The Wife of Bath.* Here he remembers particularly *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Othello.* There is ample evidence as usual, however, of the independent power of observation which is peculiarly Gay's, that massing of details about country scenes, the judges at assize, the poachers, the churchwardens, soldiers, and haymakers.

The literary satire in the play is not by any means so various as in *The Rehearsal,* with which the critics were prone to compare it. It was called rightly "an inoffensive and good-natured burlesque on the absurdities in some of the tragedies then most in favour, particularly *Venice Preserved.*" Theobald, who along with Griffin, the actor, wrote the *Key,* compares it with its prototype with some fairness.

> His Grace, with the most exquisite Judgement, has laid his Finger on the proper Subjects of Ridicule, such as, *ill-contriv'd Plots, unnatural Connections, silly Peripetia's, unreasonable Machinery, affected Stile, extravagant Rants* and *Nonsense,* and in particular the *arbitrary Pedantry* of one over-grown Writer . . . But this odd-contriv'd *What d'ye call it* . . . seems rather to be a Banter on the solemn stile of Tragedy in general, than a Satyr upon faulty Passages of our Poets.

Gay was first and foremost out to get a laugh. We cannot suppose that he was very careful in his choice of passages from popular tragedies; almost any passage in them which attempted to convey tense feeling could be turned into ridicule by change of context and a slight shift of diction. If Addison and Philips and Dennis had been really great dramatists they would none

[52] Mr. Dane Smith gives two other parallels: the "Dear happy fields, farewell!" passage with the closing lines of "Wednesday," and the "Bequests" with the similar passage in "Friday." The "happy fields" seem irreverently reminiscent of Milton. See Smith, *Plays about the Theatre in England from The Rehearsal in 1671 to the Licensing Act in 1737* (New York, 1936), pp. 94-101.

the less have suffered along with Otway and Shakespeare.[53] As it was, the task was easier and the laughter more raucous. Although this is true in general, and supports Theobald's estimate of the play, there are some shrewd cuts at individual weaknesses, some clever satire particularly on mere reverence for type, such as Dennis practiced. The ridicule was scattered so widely, and so many highly respectable plays contributed to the fun, that it is hard to see how any one could have been seriously offended by it. Rowe's *Jane Shore* was parodied, the very play beside which *The What d'ye Call It* made its first bow to the public, but Rowe never thought of being annoyed. The laughers were far in the majority; a few stood out like Dennis, who, says Pope, seemed "determined to undeceive the town at their proper cost, by writing some critical dissertations against it."[54] And he adds a very revealing sentence, "to encourage them in which laudable design, it is resolved that a preface shall be prefixed to the farce in the vindication of the nature and dignity of this new way of writing." That is to say, Pope encouraged Gay to write a preface which he knew would be deliberately provocative to Dennis. The preface certainly was just that. Pope had adopted somewhat similar tactics to draw out Dennis the preceding summer, and may have hoped for a fresh opportunity to make Dennis ridiculous, as before in *A Narrative of Dr. Robert Norris*. This time, however, Dennis refused to bite, and the schemers had to be satisfied with minor attacks to stimulate interest in the play, one from Thomas Burnet in *The Grum-*

[53] Coxe notices that Gay was reading Italian at this time, and finds Kitty Carrot's speech a burlesque imitation of a refined, though much admired sentiment in the *Pastor Fido* of Guarini.

Ah why does Nature give us so much cause,
To make kind-hearted damsels break the laws?
Why should hard laws kind-hearted lasses bind,
When too soft Nature draws us after kind?

Cf. Se'l peccar è si dolce
E'l non peccar si necessario, o troppo
Imperfetta natura,
Che repugna a la legge;
O troppo dura legge
Che la natura offendi.
—Alto Tertzo, Scena Quarta.

Fables of John Gay, p. 67 n.

[54] Pope, *Works*, VI, 223.

bler,[55] and one from Philip Horneck in *The High-German Doctor*.[56] Finally, in March or early April a more satisfactory document appeared, *The Complete Key*, already referred to. It was just the right sort of pamphlet to start talk going once again after the first flush of excitement over the play had disappeared. The preface is a vicious attack on Pope and Gay, from some friend of Philips—Pope says it was Griffin the player—an attack which, as Gay wrote to Caryll, called him a blockhead and Pope a knave.[57] The *Key* itself is a serious attempt to trace the allusions in *The What d'ye Call It*, and so well informed that Burnet thought Pope must have written it himself.[58] Theobald's hand is clear enough, however, in this part, as Mr. R. F. Jones has shown,[59] particularly in the wide knowledge of Shakespeare and in his comment on the "Put out the light" passage as compared with the note in his edition of Shakespeare. Pope says flatly in a note to his 1735 edition of his *Letters* that Theobald was the author. It is strange that Theobald should have joined a combination against Gay and Pope at this time, since he was still on friendly terms with both. The point which Gay found most conspicuous in his attack was the prominence given to the ridicule of *Cato*.

His grand charge is against the Pilgrim's Progress being read, which, he says, is directly levelled at Cato's reading Plato. To back this censure, he goes on to tell you that the Pilgrim's Progress being mentioned to be the eighth edition makes the reflection evident, the tragedy of Cato being just eight times printed. He has also endeavoured to show that every particular passage of the play alludes

[55] *The Grumbler*, March 17, 1715. "Anthony Gizzard. Censures on the new farce, entitled the What d'ye Call It." See also Pope, *Works*, VI, 225.

[56] *The High-German Doctor, with many additions and alterations* (1715-1719).

[57] Pope, *Works*, VI, 227.

[58] *The Grumbler*, May 6, 1715: "Another obliges the World with a *Key* to his own *Lock*, in which the *Wards* are all safe: Under the borrowed Shape of an Apothecary, he modestly takes an opportunity to commend the Smoothness of his own Verses, and to publish a Sale of Six Thousand of his Books. The same Arch Wag, a little before this, gave us a *Compleat Key* to his *Farce*. I think it proper to advertize him and his Journey-Man, to play no more Pranks of this kind; if they do, I have a *Master-Key* now under the File, with which I shall be able to unlock all their Secrets from the Beginning."

[59] Richard Foster Jones, *Lewis Theobald* (New York, 1919), p. 17.

to some fine part of the tragedy, which he says I have injudiciously and profanely abused.[60]

Gay could scarcely have been quite ingenuous in this. The satire on *Cato* is obvious enough, and Gay need scarcely have pretended to be so innocent, unless he had caught Pope's habit of being particularly "innocent" in all letters to Caryll.[61] He knew that this sort of attack was the best thing that could happen to his play, so valuable that one might even rashly imagine that he and Pope had put the idea of the pamphlet into Theobald's head and suggested to him that blind co-operation in a scurrilous preface from some person like Griffin would lay the scent quite properly. With or without such wily support the play was having what must have been a surprising success on the stage. Pope wrote to Caryll on March 3, 1715:

The farce has occasioned many different speculations in the town. Some looked upon it as a mere jest upon the tragic poets; others as a satire upon the late war. Mr. Cromwell, hearing none of the words and seeing the action to be tragical, was much astonished to find the audience laugh, and says the Prince and Princess must doubtless be under no less amazement on the same account. Several Templars, and others of the more vociferous kind of critics, went with a resolution to hiss, and confessed they were forced to laugh so much that they forgot the design they came with. The Court in general has in a very particular manner come into the jest, and the three first nights—notwithstanding two of them were Court nights—were distinguished by very full audiences of the first quality. The common people of the pit and gallery received it at first with great gravity and sedateness, some few with tears; but after the third day, they also took the hint, and have ever since been loud in their claps.[62]

Penkethman and Mrs. Bicknell were in the cast, and also Mrs. Bicknell's sister, Miss Younger, who, says Gay, gained much honor by the performance though she was but a parish child.

Steele helped the play on to success quite unintentionally by declaring that the farce should not have been acted if he had been in town. Acted it was twenty-eight times the first two

[60] Pope, *Works*, VI, 227. [61] *Ibid.*, VI, 222. [62] *Ibid.*, VI, 222-223.

seasons.[63] Scarcely a year passed without a revival down as late as 1750. It was published on March 19, 1715, and passed through six editions (two in Dublin) during the author's lifetime. Gay made a hundred pounds out of the farce.[64] The influence of *The What d'ye Call It* was marked, particularly in its reduction of the old hard-set genres to absurdity. "Oh fie!" says a character in Henry Fielding's *The Welsh Opera: or the Grey Mare the better Horse* (1731),

> Oh fie, you might as well say that Smiles are not proper to Tragedy—There is your Tragical Jealousy, and Comical Jealousy; your Tragical Jealousy is between Kings and Heroes; your Comical between Gentlemen and Servants; your Tragical produces its effect before it is discover'd; your Comical is discover'd before its effect; and as in Tragedy all dye, so in Comedy all are married.

By 1740, or thereabouts, Gay was looked upon as the creator of a new type of play, a type which on the surface seemed only intended to amuse, but, as Gay had said in his *Epilogue:*

> There's a Meaning in it, and no Doubt
> You all have Sense enough to find it out.

The author of *The Kapélion, or Poetical Ordinary; consisting of Great Variety of Dishes in Prose and Verse* (p. 9) talks of the beginning of this degeneration of the old fixed types, the mixture first of tragicomedy:

> Now, as this strange Mixture of *sweet* and *sower*, took with the general Palate, those, whose Business it was to please the Publick, seiz'd upon first one, and then another Species of Writing, and clap'd them together; and on the Addition of ev'ry new Ingredient, a new Name was tack'd on, and the Whole was look'd upon as new also; and in this Manner, great Numbers of *hasty Puddings* were stir'd up; 'till the celebrated Mr. *Gay* took all he could lay his Hands on, and having mess'd them together in an *Olla, Hodge-podge,* or *what do ye call it;* serv'd it up as an entire new Dish, and as such, it was received accordingly.

Not only the general idea was copied, but details of the burlesque were appropriated without shame. Joseph Reed, the

[63] Mrs. Flora Livingston's unpublished bibliography at the Harvard Library shows thirty-two benefit performances in all. [64] Pope, *Works,* VI, 223.

author of one of these mock-tragedies, *Madrigal and Trulletta* (1758), at least gives Gay full credit in his note on the necessity for a ghost in a tragedy.

> I beg leave to recommend the authority of no less ingenious and judicious a writer, than Mr. *John Gay*, of facetious memory, who in his *What d'ye call it*, puts into the mouth of the sagacious Sir *Roger* this conclusive argument, on the necessity of ghosts in dramatic exhibitions, viz. *A play without a ghost is like—is like—egad it is like nothing.* (p. 31)

Somewhat later than this, at a time when there was good reason to inquire into the habits of audience and managers, there appeared additional evidence of the play's popularity in *Three Original Letters to a Friend in the Country, on the Cause and Manner of the late Riot at the Theatre-Royal in Drury-Lane* (1763). This reviews the condition and usage of the theatre forty years earlier, the entertainments, the salaries and factors, the rights of the audience, and so on. In Letter III the writer remarks:

> Plays were then acted without farces, or any kind of additional entertainment—they had but two well-worn farces, Farquahar's *stage coach* and Gay's *what d'ye call it*—and no singers or dancers but miss Santlow, afterwards Mrs *Booth*, who sometimes entertained the audience with a single dance, at the end of a comedy, when she performed one of the ladies in it.

It is clear that Gay had no reason to complain about the popularity of this play, his first big theatrical success.[65] Not least among the attractions in it was the beautiful ballad beginning, "'Twas when the seas were roaring," with music said to have been written by Handel. It was sung and printed and quoted and parodied down through the years.[66] Four lines

[65] It is hard to explain the reference to the farce in *Gulliver Decypher'd: or Remarks On a late Book, entitled . . . Vindicating The Reverend Dean on whom it is maliciously Father'd* (1728), pp. 44-45. "The Reason of this is, that there are more Fools than People of Judgment in the World; therefore a famous Poet was certainly in the right, when giving an Account why his—*What-d'ye call it* was hiss'd off the Stage,—*D——n them*, said he, *they have not Wit enough to take it;* for really the Farce was allow'd to be a very *uncommon* Performance."

[66] Catalogued with other broadsides, *Douce Ballads* 4, in Bodleian Library, there is "A New Song. To the Tune of, 'Twas when the Seas were Roaring."

from it found a pedantic niche in Dr. Johnson's *Dictionary* to illustrate the word *motion,* and then were transcribed, misquoted, and assigned to Gray in Webster's—the lines:

> Cease, cease, thou cruel ocean,
> And let my lover rest:
> Ah! what's thy troubled motion
> To that within my breast?[67]

One of the earliest detached printings of the ballad was in the second edition of Pope's 1717 *Miscellany;* here it finds a place beside *Richy and Sandy, a Pastoral on the Death of Mr. Joseph Addison,* by another great writer of songs, Allan Ramsay, whom Gay was presently to know better. One would like to know what authority Cowper had for his statement in a letter to the Reverend W. Unwin, August 4, 1783.

> What can be prettier than Gay's ballad, or rather Swift's, Arbuthnot's, Pope's and Gay's, in the *What d'ye Call It*—'*'*Twas when the seas were roaring'? I have been well informed that they all contributed, and that the most celebrated association of clever fellows this country ever saw did not think it beneath them to unite their strength and abilities in the composition of a song.[68]

Cowper was obviously careless about some particulars in this account. There is no shred of evidence that Swift or Arbuthnot had anything to do with play or ballad. Swift in any case had been in Ireland for months before it appeared. Pope of course may have helped. It was not the first or the last time that such a conjunction produced a ballad—but not such a ballad.[69] For one thing remains certain as a standard of judgment in the welter of uncertainties about many poems produced by this group: Gay was the only one among them who possessed any considerable lyrical gift. That power is shown at its best in this particular poem, and there is no need to rob Gay of credit for the beautiful verses.

[67] *Notes and Queries,* 4th Series, IX, 482 (June 15, 1872).

[68] *The Correspondence of William Cowper,* ed. Thomas Wright (1904), II, 92.

[69] *Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu,* ed. Moy Thomas (1861), I, 506. Letter to the Countess of Mar (May or June, 1727): "Doctor Swift and Johnny Gay are at Pope's and their conjunction has produced a ballad."

III

Some hints of Gay's doings in London during the spring of 1715 can be found in his letters to Caryll and Parnell, and in Pope's letters to Jervas. Gay wrote a particularly entertaining letter to Caryll in April.[70] His play was largely off his mind, and the hundred pounds comfortably in his pocket. He was visiting among the aristocrats with Pope, or enjoying the society of his eccentric friends at Will's.

There is a grand revolution at Will's Coffee-house. Morrice has quitted for a coffee-house in the City, and Titcombe is restored, to the great joy of Cromwell, who was at a great loss for a person to converse with upon the Fathers and Church History. The knowledge I gain from him is entirely in painting and poetry; and Mr. Pope owes all his skill in astronomy, and particularly in the revolution of eclipses, to him and Mr. Whiston, so celebrated of late for his discovery of the longitude in an extraordinary copy of verses which you heard when you were last in town.

Various items follow about the production of Rowe's play, *Lady Jane Grey*, the delay in printing *Homer*, the attack on *The What d'ye Call It*, Garth's new poem, *Claremont*, on Newcastle's house, and Lord Peterborough's banishment from court. Gay tells Caryll that Pope and he are planning a visit to Ladyholt, Pope to work on *Homer* and he to enjoy himself.

For my part, who do not deal in heroes or ravished ladies, I may perhaps celebrate a milk-maid, describe the amours of your parson's daughter, or write an elegy upon the death of a hare; but my articles are quite the reverse of his, that you will interrupt me every morning, or ten to one I shall be first troublesome and interrupt you.

Suggestions about the visit recur, but the friends did not get together at Ladyholt that summer, partly because Caryll himself was moving around a good deal, and partly because Pope felt the pressure of his translation heavy upon him and

[70] Pope, *Works*, VI, 226. Will's coffeehouse was on the northwest corner of Russell St. and Bow St., Covent Garden. "It included the two adjoining houses, one in each street. The old house, No. 21 Russell Street, still standing in 1885, is no doubt one of the original buildings." See Lawrence Hutton, *Literary Landmarks of London* (1885), p. 7.

retired to Binfield to work early in June without Gay.[71] Apparently Gay planned at first to go with him. The letter from Pope to Caryll just referred to suggests such an arrangement, and the verses which Pope left in Gay's hands when he left town, *A Farewell to London,* give the same idea.

Adieu to all but Gay alone,
Whose soul, sincere and free,
Loves all mankind, but flatters none,
And so may starve with me.

These lines also hint at another preoccupation of Gay's mind during these months. The court had smiled upon him. The Princess had liked his verses; she had patronized his play; he was a favorite with her ladies. After the success of *The What d'ye Call It,* he had expected, Pope says, a present from the Princess.[72] He wrote to Parnell on March 18: "I have no place at court; therefore, that I may not entirely be without one everywhere, show that I have a place in your remembrance."[73]

The young men of Button's Club under Addison's supervision, Budgell, Philips, Tickell, Welsted, and the rest, were well supplied with offices. One would have expected that with Gay's popularity and social graces, and his interest with the Princess and her household, he might easily have found an opening, especially when the whole establishment was being reshifted. The months rolled by, and yet no friendly *Gazette* mentioned Gay. There was obviously a powerful enemy, and that enemy may very well have been Addison. Enemy is too strong a word to use here; lack of interest or merely hinting a fault would be just as disastrous as active hostility. Addison was not amused by some of the performances in which Gay had recently had a part. He had never really liked him, though for Budgell's sake he may have pretended.[74] Report, as I have mentioned, said that Gay had had something to do with that pretty epigram *Upon a Tory Lady who shed her Water at Cato,* and Addison may have believed it. In any case, the ridi-

[71] Pope, *Works,* VI, 229. [72] *Ibid.,* VI, 225. [73] *Ibid.,* VII, 455.

[74] Addison was in April, 1715, sitting for his picture to Jervas, and Gay and Pope would certainly meet him there, and elsewhere (*ibid.,* VI, 226).

cule of *Cato* in *The What d'ye Call It* was bound to distress him. Philips's story about Gay and Pope joining the Swift clique the year before to write against the Whigs should have been forgotten but probably was not. Addison, we must remember, had his old secretaryship back again, and his word had weight. Warton's story about his late apology probably refers to this critical time in Gay's history.[75]

I was informed by Mr. Spence, that Addison, in his last illness, sent to desire to speak with Mr. Gay, and told him he had much injured him; probably with respect to his gaining some appointment from the court: but, said he, if I recover, I will endeavor to recompense you.

Gay got no post for several years. One might expect his name to be mentioned as a possible successor to Tate in the laureateship, but I find no reference. Dennis was mentioned. *Mist's Weekly Journal* for August 13, 1715, has a curious note on the subject:

One cannot without Mirth watch and observe the Motions of those crafty Adversaries of all good Men the Whigs; no sooner had Mr. Tate our Poet Laureate breath'd his last, but they greedy to get that flourishing Crown firmly fix'd upon the Head of a Creature of their own kidney, that was sadly witty, and dreading, least the famous Poetical 'Squire *William Ellis* should stand Candidate, and prove too powerful a Rival, for any of the Farce-writers, publishing Compilers, Sonneteers, Madrigal-Men, and Political Rhymers at *Button's*, had given out the *Cue* among all the Newsmongers of their Party, who are proud of being reckon'd in the Secret and accomplices in the Plot, to make very sanguine Reports of the sudden Decease of the above mention'd Member of Parnassus. Accordingly, these inferiour Brothers of the Quil, who generally deal in single Pieces of Copper, for their dismal and *pitteous* Writings, were put in fee Immediately, to describe his Barbarous and Bloody Murther; but to put the Whigs out of all Fear that he opposed their Interest, he hath in several Places declar'd, that he withdrew his pretensions of Merit, for some certain Scruples of Conscience, which he intends to keep secret to himself.

[75] Joseph Warton, *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope* (5th ed., 1806), II, 246 n.

In the meantime Gay was working hard over *Trivia*, and possibly over another project designed to support Pope in this difficult time.[76] Pope's *Homer* had appeared finally on June 8, closely trailed by Tickell's version. Pope and Gay and many others thought that Addison had helped Tickell with his translation. The whole town talked. Not even the report of the Committee of Inquiry in Parliament or the beginnings of impeachment proceedings against the old ministers could compete in interest. An extract from *Mist's Weekly Journal* for June 4, 1715, will give some notion of the spirit in which the poem was received.

> The Discourse at present among the Learned, is upon the Publication of the first Volume of *Homer*, done by the most Ingenious Mr. Pope, who has already given us as many Testimonies as he has written Poems, that he alone is equal to so great an Undertaking; and this Pleasure is heightened by a Consideration, that those Enemies of Wit who would get a Name by finding Fault with any Perfection that they cannot attain to, are like to meet with as much Discouragement as Mr. Pope will with Honour and Applause: We are however advised from *Button's*, That as their Party have engrossed to themselves the whole Art of Politicks, so they will now advance with Vigour, and will continue to make violent Incursions into all the Provinces of Literature, till they have laid waste all good Sense as well as Honesty. But as the Fort of *Homer* is the first Place they set upon, and seems impregnable by Art and Nature, 'tis believ'd the Siege will be razed, and the Besiegers quit with Shame, so heedless a Project, and so unpromising an Undertaking.

Gay was fully aware of the moves and countermoves made in this disreputable literary warfare; he may have done more skirmishing himself than we realize. Tickell's preface in particular seemed to Gay and his friends an attempt to cover a discreditable action with the veneer of good manners. Fortescue suggested that Gay publish a version of the first book of the *Odyssey*, and tell the world it was only to bespeak their approbation and favor for a translation of Statius, or any other poet.[77] Someone did just that, with improvements. There presently

[76] Pope, *Works*, VIII, 12.

[77] *Ibid.*, VIII, 13.

appeared *Homer in a Nut-Shell: or, the Iliad of Homer in Immortal Doggrel. By Nickydemus Ninnyhammer, F. G.* This was dedicated to the ghost of Gilbert Burnet, and contains plentiful jibes at the coxcomb wits at Button's, but the section addressed *To the Reader* concerns us:

> This is to certify to all whom it may concern, that I had a Maggot come into my Head sometime ago to Translate all *Homer's* Works, *but had the Pleasure of being* Mortified, *by finding* the *Iliad* so incomparably done by Mr. *Pope*, and the *Odysseis* design'd to be infinitely better Translated by Mr. *Tickell*, alias *Jo. Addison. I would not therefore be thought* to endeavour to prejudice Mr. *Pope*, or *to have any other View in publishing this small Specimen of* Homer's *Iliad, than to bespeak, if possible, the Favour of the Publick to a Translation* of Homer's *Batrachomuomachia* to the Tune of *Chivy-Chase*, so justly applauded by the *Spectator:* As also the Hymns of that venerable Bard, in the Divine Style of *Sternhold* and *Hopkins, Quarles* and *Withers, wherein I have already made some* considerable *Progress. Opus diu multumque desideratum.*

This is an amusing parody of Tickell's preface, quite in Gay's manner. There is no direct evidence of his authorship, but it is worth while, I think, to call attention to the way this passage reflects the growing dislike of Addison shared by Pope and Gay, and the irritation with Burnet, and especially with the younger Burnet, who had just been bespattering *The What d'ye Call It* with hostile criticism. One might add that Gay was again and again quick to come to the aid of friends in literary squabbles, and moreover that he knew that Parnell was actually engaged on a translation of the *Batrachomyomachia.*

By the time this business was over, Gay was ready for some relaxation. He spent a week-end towards the end of June at Lady Bolingbroke's place, Bucklebury in Berkshire, and saw Pope at Binfield for a few days on the way. Gay had time to give Pope all the London gossip about his translation, and when he returned to London made that also the subject of a letter which he sent to Pope on July 8.

> I have just set down Sir Samuel Garth at the opera. He bid me tell you that everybody is pleased with your translation, but a few at

Button's; and that Sir Richard Steele told him, that Mr. Addison said Tickell's translation was the best that ever was in any language. He treated me with extreme civility, and out of kindness gave me a squeeze by the forefinger. I am informed that at Button's your character is made very free with as to morals, &c., and Mr. A[ddison] says, that your translation and Tickell's are both very well done, but that the latter has more of Homer.[78]

The friends were now giving up their plans to visit Ladyholt, and instead were organizing a party to ride together to Bath and Devonshire.[79] Dr. Arbuthnot, "Duke" Disney, Jervas, and Fortescue were all planning to go. But things turned out ill. "Jervas has ladies to paint, and Duke Disney must visit a bishop, in hopes of his conversion."[80] Pope finally got most of his party together and set out for Bath on August 18. In the meantime Gay and Fortescue had grown weary of the delay and set off for Exeter with one other person only in the party, probably Fortescue's servant. This was the famous visit to Devonshire made possible by the generosity of Lord Burlington, for which Gay wrote the delightful "thank you" letter, *An Epistle to the Right Honourable the Earl of Burlington. A Journey to Exeter.* Horace is here his model, and the verses give charming little etchings of things seen and experienced on the long ride down. The village of Stockbridge mourns over the new Septennial Act.[81]

> Sad melancholy ev'ry visage wears;
> What, no Election come in seven long years!
> Of all our race of Mayors, shall *Snow* alone
> Be by Sir *Richard's* dedication known?
> Our streets no more with tides of ale shall float,
> Nor coblers feast three years upon one vote.

The sheep out here in the country seem little like the sheep that have been filling his pastoral dreams. The cathedral at Salisbury gets less attention than the boarding school well-

[78] *Ibid.*, VII, 417. [79] *Ibid.*, VIII, 18. [80] *Ibid.*, IX, 259.

[81] Richard Steele, *The Importance of Dunkirk Considered. . . . In a Letter to the Bailiff of Stockbridge* (1713). Stockbridge had seventy voters, usually priced at £60 each. See Preface to *A Walk from St. James's to Covent Garden* (1717).

stocked with misses. The Roman road, the lobster-dinner at Morcombe, the laundry and shaving operations at Axminster, the rain storm that made the roads smoke, all these details of the journey come clear in the imagination and prepare us for the appearance of *Trivia*. He finds an inn with a scribbled verse for motto, and reflects how much better it would be if every poet could know his own genius; then many a Philips, and a Moore, and a Blackmore would confine himself to inn-signs.[82]

Gay's poem was moderately popular. It inspired the author of *Scarborough, a Poem in Imitation of Mr. Gay's Journey to Exeter* (1732),[83] and was at least remembered by the disreputable author of *Mac-Dermot; or, The Irish Fortune Hunter* (1719).

> O Thou who whilom didst from *London* ride
> To that fam'd Town which *Isca's* Waves divide,
> On thy proud Steed, inspir'd with sacred Rage,
> In deathless Rhymes describing ev'ry Stage;
> Thine be the Task, in the same lofty Strain,
> To bring *Mac-Dermot* o'er St. *George's* Main,
> To tell th' Adventures of his tedious *Route*,
> And how from *Holy Head* he trudg'd on Foot;
> My Muse his Wishes with Success to crown,
> Concludes his Toil, and fixes him in Town.[84]

Gay's poem was written in the year of the actual journey, 1715, and doubtless performed its social function with sufficient elegance in manuscript that year. It was printed after December 22, 1715, and probably in March, 1716, along with the fifth edition of the poem to Caroline, *A Letter to a Lady*.[85]

[82] *A Journey to Exeter* was reprinted in the *English Illustrated Magazine*, Vol. IV (April, May, June, 1887) with sketches by Hugh Thomson. These sketches were used by Austin Dobson in his edition of the poem in 1894.

[83] *The Scarborough Miscellany For the Year 1732* (2d ed., 1734), p. 1.

[84] Pope, *Works*, VI, 233. It may be well to add the usual reminder about the difficulties of travel in the early eighteenth century. Lady Cowper notes in her *Diary* (1864 ed., p. 30): "Lady *Essex Robartes* came in the Evening to take her Leave of me, she being to begin her Cornish Journey tomorrow Morning, which she will be about twelve Days in performing. She undertakes it with great Fear."

[85] See p. 142, below. The Lintot account-book records under Dec. 22, 1715, the payment to Gay of £43 for the copyright of *Trivia* and £10 15*s*. for copyright of *An Epistle to the Earl of Burlington*. Lintot usually paid promptly a few days before publication. Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes*, VIII, 296.

Further particulars about this journey to Devonshire are unknown. Gay doubtless visited Fortescue for a time at Buckland Filleigh near Barnstaple. He may have gone to Barnstaple, and he may later have joined Pope and Arbuthnot at Bath, and accompanied them on the return trip a few days earlier than October 11. The only references to the journey apart from the poem appear in a letter Gay wrote to Parnell shortly after the publication of *Trivia*, January 26, 1716. Gay tells his long-neglected friend that he has been in Devonshire the preceding summer and has spent the winter in town at his usual lodgings with Mrs. Bonyer. All he remembers about the journey is that he busied himself with writing *Trivia*, gathering mushrooms, which poisoned him, and making love to the country girls, whom—at least for the sake of epigram—he prefers to the court ladies.

I was last summer in Devonshire, and am this winter at Mrs. Bonyer's. In the summer I wrote a poem, and in the winter I have published it, which I have sent to you by Dr. Ellwood. In the summer I ate two dishes of toadstools, of my own gathering, instead of mushrooms; and in the winter I have been sick with wine, as I am at this time, blessed be God for it! as I must bless God for all things. In the summer I spoke truth to damsels; in the winter I told lies to ladies. Now you know where I have been, and what I have done.[86]

This letter was part of a club-affair which a batch of friends —Gay, Jervas, Arbuthnot, and Pope—dining at a chophouse in Cornhill were getting ready for the edification of Parnell as part of the genial after-effect of a good dinner and wine. The letter was addressed almost as much to Swift as to Parnell, as all of the friends sent messages to him and longed for his company. Jervas was already planning to visit Ireland that summer. Arbuthnot remarked that nothing was wanting "to complete our happiness but your company, and our dear friend the dean's. . . . Our love again and again to the dear dean; *fuimus* tories; I can say no more." This party on Cornhill may have been an informal celebration of the success of *Trivia*. Gay had just got his money from Lintot, and was on his way to the

[86] Pope, *Works*, VII, 458.

Bank to negotiate some exchange bills. He was particularly eager that his new poem should please the Dean.

This work had been in process of composition for over a year, and the final publication was probably somewhat delayed by the anxiety of Gay and his friends to pile up as large a subscription list as possible, an effort which was highly successful. Pope writes to Caryll, January 10, 1716:

> To answer your remaining queries, Mr. Plowden's book is in my custody, Gay's poem just on the brink of the press, to which we have had the interest to procure him subscriptions of a guinea a book to a pretty tolerable number. I believe it may be worth £150 to him in the whole.[87]

Arbuthnot says that "Gay has got so much money by his Art of Walking the Streets, that he is ready to set up his equipage." Addison was still friendly enough to subscribe for ten volumes. An undated letter from Gay to Addison has recently turned up in the Tickell Papers. It belongs to this time, and must be quoted entire:

> I have sent you only two Copys of my Poems though by your Subscription you are entitled to ten, whatever Books you want more Tonson or Lintot upon your sending will deliver.
>
> I cannot neglect this Occasion of returning you my thanks for the Benefits you have done me & I beg you to believe that I have such a just sense of them, if you even could think of doing more for me, you could not ingage me further to you, for 'tis impossible to owe you more Love & Gratitude than I do already.[88]

The support which Addison gave to Gay's project at this time may seem to contradict what has been already said about the relations between the two men. For reasons which we cannot enter into here, there had been a change of attitude in the course of that winter, and Addison was trying to conciliate Pope and his friends.[89] Burnet wrote to Duckett that "Addison and the rest of the Rhiming Gang have dropt their Resentment

[87] *Ibid.*, VI, 237.

[88] Richard Eustace Tickell, *Thomas Tickell and the Eighteenth Century Poets (1685-1740)* (London, 1931), p. 77.

[89] See Sherburn, *The Early Career of Alexander Pope*, p. 177.

against the *Lordlike Man.*"[90] In any case, a gift of ten pounds is just about what Addison's conscious rectitude would produce if he remembered earlier neglect of Gay.

Trivia was first published in an octavo volume of ninety-six pages, on January 26, 1716. Bernard Lintot was responsible for the issue, and the price was one-and-six-pence, though some special large-paper copies were sold by subscription at one guinea. This edition did not contain the Cloacina incident, which appeared first in the collected edition of Gay's *Poems* published in 1720. *Trivia* is without question the greatest poem on London life in English literature. It is not, perhaps, of epic length, but is sufficiently long to mention or describe at least sixty ways of earning a living, and more than thirty-five separate localities. It is full of the most varied and interesting detail. And, in addition, it shows real architectonic ability in the persistent success with which the framework of classical burlesque is handled. The poem is divided into three parts: the first describes the implements for walking the streets and the signs of the weather; the second tells of walking the streets by day; and the third, of walking the streets by night. The burlesque of the classical formulas is elaborately conceived and amusingly carried through; none of it is by any means stupid, though Warton disliked the Cloacina episode and blamed Swift's muddy mind for that suggestion. Not arms and the man, but streets and crowds are to be sung. Not the Muse, but Trivia, the Goddess of the Three Roads, will aid; and the poet shows the proper enthusiasm for his task, even though vulgar minds may consider it very much of a middle flight that he intends to soar. Each book begins with the expected compliments, and the peroration at the end is humorously magnificent. There are, besides, some fifteen parodies of the classical simile, several of which have the true Vergilian ring. Moreover, the main business of the poem is interrupted by two episodes, one describing the invention of the patten, the other, the introduction of the bootblack to London streets. The latter should not really be styled

[90] *The Letters of Thomas Burnet to George Duckett 1712-1722*, ed. Nichol Smith (1914), p. 99.

an interruption at all, for after an extremely short visit to "Jove's eternal throne," we continue our wanderings about the streets; and, though we may not like the company of the dirty goddess with her fantastic decorations scatalogical, we may be sure that she is by no means so conspicuous among her earthborn sisters as we might fear.[91]

The poem was received with acclaim. A second edition appeared in the same year and a third in 1730. A pirated edition was published before 1720 by Mrs. Newcomb, and a Dublin edition in 1727, five in all during the author's lifetime and many more since down to the handsome recent printing, edited by W. H. Williams.[92]

Once again Gay had scored a success with a new scheme. The classical pattern once again kept him steady. His sure chance of success seemed to lie in the filling in of a known design with materials that his eye had seen. Gay took his pattern from the *Georgics*, but many of the hints for the subjects actually treated come from three other Latin poems, Juvenal's third satire, Persius' fifth, and Horace's fifth satire in Book I. The first of these is unquestionably the most important. John Oldham had recognized its possibilities for modern adaptation back in 1682, and after Gay's time Samuel Johnson made his poetical debut with a poem inspired by the same great original. Juvenal wrote about conditions which on the surface may appear tied to time and place, but which beneath the surface have a large universality as steady as nature herself. For that reason we read his poem still with imaginative sympathy and allow our minds to range freely for modern variations on the old themes. Human nature is before us, and the idea of progress retreats to its proper corner. Immigration, race mixture, graft, the crime wave all find a place, and a thousand and one other topics relevant to city life in all times. The contrasts of wealth and poverty, typical characters from all classes

[91] I quote here a paragraph from my earlier book, *John Gay's London, Illustrated from the Poetry of the Time* (Cambridge, Mass., 1928), p. 150, where the reader may find a more detailed study of *Trivia* and its influence on English poetry.

[92] See *ibid.*, pp. 419-421.

of society, minor details about the inconveniences and dangers of life in a great city are suggested with a vivid picturesqueness that touches the secret springs of imagination and brings to life Rome as it was in those long-past years. One feels as if digging in the graves of buried civilizations, so close does one get to the very bodies of the people.

Gay no doubt felt the power of this poem. At any rate he managed to do for London and social conditions there in the early eighteenth century very much what Juvenal had done for Rome, and his poem reflects a similar enthusiasm for that special kind of poetical description. He lacks the reforming spirit of Juvenal, and his satiric temper—what there is of it—is closer to Horace than to the great pulpit-thumping poet of the early empire. For instance, Juvenal, like Persius, had brought the rake within the scope of his satire as combining the characteristics of several noisome varieties, among them libertine, bully, fop, and bore. The account which Juvenal gives of him is often supposed to be exaggerated, but, as M. Widal has pointed out, the poet is everywhere supported by the historians and merely makes the dry facts of the chronicles vivid in our minds.[93] Juvenal shows exquisite genius particularly in placing this full-fed scion of the wealthy beside the poor wretch he is bullying on the street, and making him talk about food. The pitiful injustice of the whole thing comes out with amazing clearness. The wolf addresses the lamb. There is no redress. Justice tips the scale with gold, and a jest on your rags. The extraordinary force of this indictment on society is but heightened by the complete absence of bitterness. Gay's treatment of the rake is entirely different and from a biographer's point of view particularly interesting. It does not in the least suggest that the author of *Trivia* was a milksop. The lapdog type of man does not thrust the bully into the kennel so energetically.

> But when the bully, with assuming pace,
> Cocks his broad hat, edg'd round with tarnish'd lace,
> Yield not the way; defie his strutting pride,

[93] Auguste Widal, *Juvenal et ses satires* (2d ed., Paris, 1870), chap. ii.

And thrust him to the muddy kennel's side;
He never turns again, nor dares oppose,
But mutters coward curses as he goes.[94]

And when Gay reminds his readers of the furor over the Mohocks of 1712, he adopts a tone that absolutely refuses to be serious.

Now is the time that rakes their revells keep;
Kindlers of riot, enemies of sleep.
His scatter'd pence the flying *Nicker* flings,
And with the copper show'r the casement rings.
Who has not heard the *Scowrer's* midnight fame?
Who has not trembled at the *Mohock's* name?
Was there a watchman took his hourly rounds,
Safe from their blows, or new-invented wounds?
I pass their desp'rate deeds, and mischiefs done
Where from *Snow-hill* black steepy torrents run;
How matrons, hoop'd within the hogshead's womb,
Were tumbled furious thence, the rolling tomb
O'er the stones thunders, bounds from side to side.
So *Regulus* to save his country dy'd.[95]

We have already noticed Gay's use of Horace's *Journey to Brundisium* as a model for his *Epistle to the Earl of Burlington. Trivia* also is colored in the quality of its images by this well-known poem. Of course the "Wanderer" is a familiar type in every literature. His lyrical outpourings do not concern us here, but we must notice him when he descends from his airy nothings to tell us about commonplace journeys from town to town, the things seen and the accidents worth recording. In English literature there is a vast amount of verse that may be grouped under this caption "Journeys." Some of it is of the street-ballad variety, the kind of verses for which Gay always had a decided weakness. It may be of as high an antiquity as *London Lickpenny* or as late as some of the verses in *Pills to Purge Melancholy*. But verses of this crude sort probably had little enough influence on Gay. Many of the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century "Journey" poems trace their an-

[94] *The Poetical Works of John Gay*, p. 66. [95] *Ibid.*, p. 85.

cestry back only as far as *Hudibras*, but the followers of Hudibras bestride a foundered Pegasus, and Gay shows little interest.

> Equipt for journey, mounted on a steed,
> That sprung (I guess) from Hudibras's breed;
> A foundered Pegasus, as e're was rid;
> As old and blind as ever man bestrid;
> Some baker's drudge he'd been for many years;
> And like his master too, had lost his ears.[96]

Ned Ward had ridden this broken-down steed to exhaustion. His *Vade Mecum for Maltworms* appeared before *Trivia*, and was, like Gay's poem, cast in the form of a journey. It turns out to be, though, not much more than a catalogue, in *The Search after Claret* style, of the alehouses of the town, with comments on each often of an interesting character. One wonders sometimes how even a hardened sinner could get a third of the way on such a pilgrimage, and again how much the Grub Street writer was paid for some of his very valuable advertisements.

Certainly many a poet major and minor before Gay had attempted to recreate in his verses the life of the London streets. Society, like its fine ladies, was growing increasingly fond of the mirror. It was amused and flattered sometimes even by distortions. It was intellectually keen enough to be critical, but not sufficiently virile to be creative in the romantically exaggerated sense of that word. Let us know the men about us. Let us find in your verses the town, the clubs, the streets, the taverns, the amusement places. Pastorals, lyrics, epics may be clever, charming, even profound, but for the most part get down to the pavement on which our heels grind. Gay knew this to be the spirit of the age and he was willing enough to cater to it.

Apart from one circumstance his *Trivia* is decidedly an original. That one thing was the fact that Swift had a few years before in *The Tatler* published two brief poems in exactly the same manner, *Morning* and *A Description of a City Shower*.

[96] *A Trip lately to Scotland, with a true Character of the Country and People* (1705).

Gay acknowledged the value of the hint in his Advertisement to *Trivia* with his usual candor. He caught without apparent effort the peculiar quality of Swift's description, added the framework of burlesque classicism, and extended the scope of his poem to cover innumerable aspects of city life. In this extension of the idea his resources were his own powers of observation, his own love of the streets, and his memory for the things that had actually happened to him there. The Thames was actually frozen over that very winter for seven long weeks, not for three months as in the great frost of 1710 that Gay recalls.

> O roving Muse, recal that wond'rous year,
> When winter reign'd in bleak *Britannia's* air;
> When hoary *Thames,* with frosted oziers crown'd,
> Was three long moons in icy fetters bound.
> The waterman, forlorn along the shore,
> Pensive reclines upon his useless oar,
> Sees harness'd steeds desert the stony town,
> And wander roads unstable, not their own:
> Wheels o'er the harden'd waters smoothly glide,
> And rase with whiten'd tracks the slipp'ry tide.
> Here the fat cook piles high the blazing fire,
> And scarce the spit can turn the steer entire.
> Booths sudden hide the *Thames,* long streets appear,
> And num'rous games proclaim the crouded fair.
> So when a gen'ral bids the martial train
> Spread their encampment o'er the spacious plain;
> Thick-rising tents a canvas city build,
> And the loud dice resound thro' all the field.

The soldiers, too, Gay had seen, and the tent-pegs driven home, as the regiments made camp in Hyde Park when the town feared the Jacobite insurrection. The temptation is strong to go through the poem in this fashion illustrating the sort of material around which Gay let his imagination play. One can turn over the sheets of any newspaper of the time and find incidents and scenes directly parallel to Gay's descriptions, soon losing oneself in the fascinations of social history. His advice to repel idle superstition from the mind, and his long list of

credulities current, was no mere talk. People still feared occult influences, and in their minds God's judgments bore little relation to natural law. In her *Diary* Lady Cowper describes vividly the effect that the appearance of a comet on the night of March 6, 1716, had on the vulgar.

> Both Parties turned it on their Enemies. The Whigs said it was *God's* Judgment on the horrid Rebellion, and the Tories said that it came for the Whigs taking off the two Lords that were executed. I could hardly make my Chairmen come Home with me, they were so frightened, and I was forced to let my Glass down, and preach to them as I went along, to comfort them. I'm sure Anybody that had overheard the Dialogue would have laughed heartily. All the People were drawn out into the Streets, which were so full One could hardly pass, and all frighted to death.[97]

Gay knew well the temper of the people, the cruelties of the carmen, the insolence of liveried servants, the brutality of the common crowd at Tyburn and at the pillory. *The Weekly Journal* for July 15, 1721, recorded a particularly horrid example of the sadistic cruelty of the mob, when "Barbara Spencer, the Woman who was burnt, was struck down by a Stone in the midst of her Prayers"; and another case noted in the same journal, that of a man pelted so badly on the pillory that he died, would be equally revolting, if there were not a suspicion that the man had died from the effects of a pint and a half of brandy that he drank before he undertook to face the mob.[98] Gay advises the wary walker to avoid such a dangerous neighborhood,

> Where elevated o'er the gaping croud,
> Clasp'd in the board the perjur'd head is bow'd,
> Betimes retreat; here, thick as hailstones pour
> Turnips, and half-hatch'd eggs, (a mingled show'r)
> Among the rabble rain: Some random throw
> May with the trickling yolk thy cheek o'er flow.

Gay is aware of all the tricks of the town, the guinea-droppers, the cardsharps, the pickpockets with their accomplices

[97] *Diary of Mary Countess Cowper, Lady of the Bedchamber to the Princess of Wales, 1714-1720* (1864), pp. 91-92.

[98] *The Weekly Journal* for July 27, 1723.

the bullies who start sham quarrels, and the ballad singers who collect the crowds. Gay would hear later of the sad case in which his friend Arbuthnot was involved.

On Sunday Morning the Duke de la Force, lately arrived from France, came to the Choir in St. Paul's Cathedral, and heard Divine Service with great Attention, and we hear his Grace is about to embrace the Protestant Religion.

At the same Time an unlucky Accident happen'd, which 'tis to be hop'd will make no evil Impressions upon his Grace, as being a Stranger to our Customs, viz. Dr. Arbuthnott, one of his Majesty's Physicians, while engag'd at his Devotions, had his Pocket pick'd of a Gold Snuff Box of about £50 value.

This was the town that Gay knew, and he brought it to life in his poem. Incidentally, he managed to put himself and some of his friends in the picture.

> Come, F[ortescue], sincere, experienc'd friend,
> Thy briefs, thy deeds, and ev'n thy fees suspend;
> Come let us leave the *Temple's* silent walls,
> Me bus'ness to my distant lodging calls:
> Through the long *Strand* together let us stray:
> With thee conversing I forget the way.

He laments the passing of the great houses along the Strand, Arundel, Essex, Cecil, Bedford, Villiers, now no more, but delights in Burlington's fair palace with its promise of encouragement to poet and musician.

> There *Hendel* strikes the strings, the melting strain
> Transports the soul, and thrills through ev'ry vein;
> There oft I enter (but with cleaner shoes)
> For *Burlington's* belov'd by ev'ry Muse.

Round about the bookstalls he can wander, plucking the flowers of learning.

> Here saunt'ring prentices o'er *Otway* weep,
> O'er *Congreve* smile, or over *D*[*ennis*] sleep;
> Pleas'd sempstresses the *Lock's* fam'd *Rape* unfold,
> And *Squirts* read *Garth*, 'till apozems grow cold.

The critics all liked the poem. It was widely imitated and quoted. The earliest imitation was an anonymous poem called *A Walk from St. James's to Covent Garden, the Back-Way, Through the Meuse* (1717). This announces itself as an imitation of *The Journey to Exeter*, but is really closer to *Trivia* than to Gay's other poem. Starting from Pall-Mall,

> whose friendly Surface scorns
> To hurt the gouty Feet or horny Corns,

the author passes through the Haymarket,

> Where Grooms smell over *Pots* of *Ale*, and *Hay;*
> Waggons and Carts, ill-crowded in the Throng
> Reminded me of *Suckling's* glorious *Song*.

The beggar meets his eye:

> A blinded *Woman* with some Lines at Breast,
> That both her Parish, and her Age confess'd;
> On Stool she sat and mournful mov'd her Head,
> And seem'd to say give Money—that gives Bread.

These are not good verses, but there are some curious pictures of the streets in the poem, crude though the form invariably is.

James Heywood devotes a whole poem "To Mr. Gay, on his Poem entitled *Trivia, or, the Art of Walking the Streets of London*" (1724).

> O *Gay!* my grateful Thoughts do crowd my Mind,
> To tell you what harmonious Lines I find
> In this thy *Trivia,* such Beauties shine,
> I'm pleas'd to see a Wonder in each Line:
> So much thy tow'ring Thoughts my Fancy fire,
> The more I read, the more I still admire.
> What Critic with his stabbing Pen can stain
> Thy tuneful Verses, or eclipse thy Fame?
> The very *Momus* which insults thy Name,
> Envies thy Genius, tho' thy Verses blame.
> Thy useful Hints direct the rural 'Squire,
> His Steps from wandring Females to retire.
> To hoary Heads thou'rt an indulgent Friend,
> And those which under heavy Burdens bend.

When jostling busy Crowds walk in the Street,
And helpless Objects, Blind and Lame, we meet,
Thou dost instruct us what Respect to pay,
To give the Wall, and when to take the Way.
These Men with thankful Voice will give thee Praise,
Pray for thy Health, and wish thee prosp'rous Days,
Whether by *Phoebus's* Meridian Light,
Or in the gloomy Horror of the Night
I walk, in winding Alleys, Streets unknown,
And lose my Way in this great Hive the Town,
By thy Directions, I shall fear no Ill,
No panic Terror shall my Bosom fill:
Whilst I walk Streets, thy Precepts I'll imbibe,
Trivia shall be my Convoy and my Guide.[99]

Warton finds *Trivia* Gay's best poem, and praises it for its genuine humor and pictures of London life. He groups it with other famous burlesques of the time, *The Splendid Shilling* of Philips, the *Muscipula* of Holdsworth, the *Scribleriad* of Richard Owen Cambridge, the *Machinae Gesticulantes* of Addison, and the *Hobbinol* of Somerville.[100]

[99] James Heywood, *Original Poems on Several Occasions* (1722), p. 25. See also *An Epistle to Sir J[e]r[em]y S[am]b[roo]k.* By a Gentleman at the University of Cambridge (1735); *The Cheshire Huntress, and the Old Fox caught at Last. A Dramatic Tale* (1740); Nicholas James, "Wrestling, A Poem," *Poems on Several Occasions* (1742), p. 21; William Heard, *A Sentimental Journey to Bath, Bristol, and their Environs; a Descriptive Poem* (1778).

[100] Joseph Warton, *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope* (5th ed., 1806), II, 244.

CHAPTER IV

NOTORIETY AND SUCCESS

Three Hours after Marriage (1717)
Poems on Several Occasions (1720)

I

THE NEXT LITERARY task that Gay turned to was an elaboration of an idea that had pleased him back in the days when he was writing *Araminta* for Steele's *Miscellany*, that is, turning the pastoral ridicule into a vehicle for social satire. Thus he became the creator of the town eclogue. Five of these eclogues were eventually published in his *Poems on Several Occasions* (1720), namely, *The Birth of the Squire*, *The Toilette*, *The Tea-Table*, *The Funeral*, and *The Espousal*. We cannot in most cases discover many particulars about their composition, but the publication of one of them, *The Toilette*, occasioned a flurry in more quarters than one, and to that story we must now turn.

That Gay wrote the poem is clear from Pope's remarks to Spence on the subject.

> Lydia, in Lady Mary Wortley Montague's Poems, is almost wholly Gay's; and is published as such in his works. There are only five or six lines new set in it by that lady. It was that which gave the hint; and she wrote the other five eclogues.

In 1716, Pope's friendship for Lady Mary was passing through one of its more acute stages, and Gay was frequently drawn into social engagements with them.[1] He apparently took *The Toilette* to one of these meetings and read it for criticism.

[1] See a letter from Jervas to Pope (Pope, *Works*, VIII, 19): "Lady Mary W[ortle]y ordered me by an express this Wednesday morning, *sedente Gayo et ridente Fortescuvio*, to send you a letter, or some other proper notice, to come to her on Thursday, about five o'clock, which I suppose she meant in the evening. Gay designed to have been with you to-day, and I would have had him deliver this welcome message, but he durst not venture to answer for your coming upon his asseverations, you having interchangeably so accustomed yourselves to lying, that you cannot believe one another, though upon never so serious an occasion."

Lady Mary had never heard anything quite like this poem before, was so much interested that she suggested a few lines by way of addition, and presently began writing town eclogues on her own account. These poems upset more than one apple-cart. Gay was fond of these delicious court triflers that he ridicules. His style was usually playful, rather than malicious, and he avoided personalities. But Lady Mary's edges were sharp; she saw the virtue of the form, and proposed to use it as a pillory for the black beasts she found about her in high society. All too quickly she wrote *The Basset Table* and *Roxana, or the Drawing-Room*, and made the distinguished ladies who figure in them plainly recognizable, especially the Duchess of Roxburghe, the Duchess of Shrewsbury, and the Princess of Wales. Now Lady Mary had no desire to place her poetic light under a bushel or to enjoy her joke in private. She allowed the manuscript of these poems, along with that of Gay's *Toilette* to circulate much too readily among her acquaintance. The inevitable happened. Curll got possession of the manuscript and published *Court Poems*. Viz: I. *The Basset-Table*. An eclogue. II. *The Drawing-Room*. III. *The Toilet*.

Publish'd faithfully, as they were found in a Pocket-Book taken up in Westminster-Hall, the Last Day of the Lord Winton's Tryal. London: Printed for J. Roberts, near the Oxford Arms in Warwick-Lane. MDCCVI. Price Six-Pence.

The name of no author was printed on the title page, but in the advertisement Curll hints at the possibilities in his usual wily fashion, caring nothing for truth and much for sales.

The *Reader* is acquainted, from the *Title-Page*, how I came possess'd of the following *Poems*. All that I have to add, is, only a Word or two concerning their *Author*.

Upon Reading them over at St. *James's Coffee-House*, they were attributed by the General Voice to be the Productions of a *Lady* of *Quality*.

When I produc'd them at *Button's*, the *Poetical Jury* there brought in a different Verdict; and the *Foreman* strenuously insisted upon it, that Mr. GAY was the *Man;* and declar'd, in Comparing the *Basset-Table*, with that Gentleman's PASTORALS, he found

the *Stile*, and *Turn of Thought*, to be evidently the same; which confirm'd him, and his Brethren, in the Sentence they had pronounc'd.

Not content with these Two Decisions, I was resolv'd to call in an Umpire; and accordingly chose a Gentleman of distinguish'd Merit, who lives not far from *Chelsea*. I sent him the Papers; which he return'd to me the next Day, with this Answer:

Sir, Depend upon it, these Lines could come from no other Hand, than the Judicious Translator of HOMER.

Thus having impartially given the Sentiments of the *Town;* I hope I may deserve Thanks, for the Pains I have taken, in endeavouring to find out the *Author* of these Valuable Performances; and every Body is at Liberty to bestow the Laurel as they please.

It was highly important at the moment that people should not bestow the laurel for these poems on Gay. Lady Mary might be angry, and she actually was, angry enough apparently to suggest at least a beating for Curll. Pope also was angry, and arranged the famous meeting with Curll in a tavern, at which he managed to administer an emetic in his sack, the trail of which along with the worm-powder lingered on through many of the angry pamphlets of succeeding years. But Gay at the moment was still hoping for preferment at court,[2] and it was distinctly awkward to be singled out as the author of these scandalous poems, especially when one really was the author of one of them.[3] On his part the only course was discreet silence. It is hard to see how Pope's *Horrid and Barbarous Revenge by Poison On the Body of Mr. Edmund Curll, Bookseller* either in actuality or in the pamphlet he wrote with that title a few days later could have been of much service to his friend. The damage was done; suspicion was started. The story of Curll's discomfiture might start a laugh in the somewhat brutal society of the time; the recital of his sins as he recounts them at point of death in the pamphlet would remind people how utterly unreliable a person he was. But the answer to the

[2] This is part of Pope's argument against the publication as reported twelve years later by Curll in *The Curliad* (p. 21): "Mr. *Gay's* Interest at Court, would be greatly hurt by publishing these Pieces."

[3] The others are certainly Lady Mary's. See *Notes and Queries*, 7th Series, IX, 515 (June 28, 1890).

question, Who wrote the verses? still remained blank, and everybody knew that the author must be someone of conspicuous literary talent, and someone also who had access to inner court circles. Caroline had been in England only a few months more than one year, and must have many times felt conscious of the critical attitude towards her. The possibility that one of the friends she really trusted might have joined a conclave with such a person as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu to ridicule her must have been disquieting.[4] No sign of displeasure was given, fortunately. One would like to think that Gay found some way to clear himself without implicating others, but we know nothing of it. The pleasant relations with the court remained unbroken. Bellenden, Lepel, and Griffin, dear ladies all, still petted the poets and were petted by them.

In Truth, by what I can discern,
Of Courtiers 'twixt you Three,
Some Wit you have, and more may learn
From Court, than *Gay* or Me:
Perhaps, in Time you'll leave high Diet,
To sup with us on Milk and Quiet.

At *Leicester-Fields*, a House full high,
With Door all painted Green,
Where Ribbons wave upon the Tye,
(a *Milliner* I mean;)
There may you meet us Three to Three,
For *Gay* can well make Two of me.
With a fa, la, la.

But shou'd you catch the Prudish Itch,
And each become a Coward,
Bring sometimes with you Lady *R*[*ic*]*h*,
And sometimes Mistress *H*[*owar*]*d;*
For Virgins to keep Chaste, must go
Abroad with such as are not so.[5]

At some time during that spring (1716), probably very shortly after March 7, when Curll published Sir Richard Black-

[4] See *Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (1861), II, 432-448.
[5] Pope, *The Challenge: a Court Ballad.*

more's *Essays*, Gay had the chance to come to the defence of Swift against the enemy. In the section of his book dealing with wit, Blackmore had seen fit to devote a page and a half to a diatribe against *A Tale of a Tub* and that "impious buffoon," its author. Blackmore on wit—I use the word in its older sense —was strange enough anyway, though this was not the first time he had braved laughter by attempting to deal with the subject, but Blackmore on wit attacking the wittiest man of the age was irresistible, and Gay found himself moved to broadcast a satire on Blackmore which may conceivably have been a crude original of the *Verses To be placed under the Picture of England's Arch-Poet* later printed in the Motte *Miscellanies, The Third Volume* (1732). Pope refers to some such verses in a letter to Jervas, dated inexplicably November 14, 1716.

> Gay is yours and theirs [Swift and Parnell]. His spirit is awakened very much in the cause of the dean, which has broke forth in a courageous couplet or two upon Sir Richard Blackmore. He has printed it with his name to it, and bravely assigns no other reason, than that the said Sir Richard has abused Dr. Swift.[6]

Since, however, the ill-mannered and badly written squib, *Verses To be placed under the Picture of England's Arch-Poet*, contains references to poems by Blackmore published much later than 1716,[7] one must conclude that Pope was referring not to it, but to the four severe but dignified lines on Blackmore in *An Epistle to the Earl of Burlington* already discussed, which bring Blackmore down to the level of the country sign-painters.

> Then *Maurus* in his proper sphere might shine,
> And these proud numbers grace great *William's* sign.
> *This is the man, this the* Nassovian, *whom*
> *I nam'd the brave deliverer to come.*

Pope's letter to Jervas seems to be wrongly dated. It contains an appeal to Jervas to urge Parnell to send on his *Zoilus*, which Pope wanted in hand for defensive tactics before the second volume of his translation of *Homer* appeared (March 24).

[6] Pope, *Works*, VIII, 22.

[7] See Professor Theodore F. M. Newton's article, "Blackmore's Eliza," *Harvard Studies and Notes*, XVIII, 116 n. (1936).

More doubts are suggested by the opening sentence of the letter which follows the one under discussion in the Courthope arrangement: "That you have not heard from me of late, ascribe not to the usual laziness of your correspondent, but . . ." That alone should have raised doubts in Courthope's mind, or in any editor's, since the letter is dated November 29, and two weeks could scarcely be thought of as a long interval in a London-Dublin correspondence. Jervas had gone to Ireland in February, and this letter telling about Gay's irreverent treatment of Blackmore was probably sent some time in the late spring, later certainly than March 7 when Blackmore's *Essays* appeared. This theory would give us an approximate date for the first printing of *An Epistle to Burlington*, hitherto uncertain.

As in the preceding spring, Gay and Pope planned from time to time to visit Ladyholt, but the visit never came off. One suspects that the conversation in the Caryll household was not the most sprightly. By the end of July, Gay was off to Devonshire once more, and planning to make the circuit around to Bath before his return.[8] Pope had been gadding about to various places during the late summer, Bath last of all, and the two friends may have met there and journeyed back to London together. In any case, Pope would take the first opportunity to show Gay a letter he had received from Swift (dated August 30, 1716), which contained a special message for his friend:

> There is a young ingenious Quaker in this town who writes verses to his mistress not very correct, but in a strain purely what a poetical Quaker should do, commending her look and habit, etc. It gave me a hint that a set of Quaker pastorals might succeed, if our friend Gay could fancy it, and I think it a fruitful subject; pray hear what he says. I believe farther, the pastoral ridicule is not exhausted, and that a porter, footman, or chairman's pastoral might do well. Or what think you of a Newgate pastoral, among the whores and thieves there?[9]

This was the best kind of encouragement for Gay to elaborate the idea already used in *The Toilette* and the other Town Eclogues. Before long he was busy with a Quaker eclogue called

[8] Pope to Parnell, July 29, 1716 (Pope, *Works*, VII, 463).

[9] Swift, *Letters*, II, 330.

The Espousal and another little poem which hailed *The Birth of the Squire* in high heroics after the fashion of Vergil's *Pollio*. These are both well-fashioned and distinctly amusing poems. *The Espousal*[10] is as fresh as the flowers in May, compared with most of the verses inspired by ridicule of the Quakers in those days, and both poems contain smart touches of that Hogarthian humor that has done so much to keep Gay's fame alive. The squire is duly born and passes through the usual experiences of youth, until in maturity he rides to hounds, snores away debates in Parliament, dispenses justice with grave nod, and glories in the strength of his beer.

> Methinks I see him in his hall appear,
> Where the long table floats in clammy beer,
> 'Midst mugs and glasses shatter'd o'er the floor,
> Dead-drunk his servile crew supinely snore;
> Triumphant, o'er the prostrate brutes he stands,
> The mighty bumper trembles in his hands;
> Boldly he drinks, and like his glorious sires,
> In copious gulps of potent ale expires.

Other pamphlets sent out by the Gay-Pope-Arbuthnot circle during the autumn months of this year were concerned with the current rage for punning. The Scriblerians had always indulged in this riotous vice. Smedley later credited Swift with a fable on *The Original of Punning, from Plato's Symposiades*.[11]

> Once on a Time, in merry Mood,
> Jove made a *Pun* of Flesh and Blood;
> A double, two-fac'd living Creature,
> *Androgynous*, of Two-fold Nature; . . .
> Whatever Words the *Female* spoke;
> The *Male* converted to a Joke:
> So, in this Form of Man and Wife,
> They led a merry *Punning* Life.

[10] This was set to music. See the British Museum catalogue, entry under "Gay—*The Espousal*": "On Monday next the 14th of August, at the Marlborough Bowling-Green, will be perform'd . . . in the 3rd Act the following ode by . . . John Gay, etc. [Commencing: 'Beneath the shadow of a Beaver's Hat,' etc.], Dublin? 1720? single sheet folio."

[11] *Gulliveriana: or a Fourth Volume of Miscellanies. Being a Sequel of the Three Volumes, published by Pope and Swift* (1728), pp. 58, 79.

Swift ventured, in a burlesque *History of Poetry,* to insist on one main principle.

> I will therefore only venture to lay down one Maxim, That a good Poet, if he designs to *Tickle* the World, must be *Gay* and *Young;* but if he proposes to give us rational Pleasure, he must be as Grave as a *Pope.*

In October or early in November, 1716, one of the group, facetiously revolting against the practice, published an amusing little two-page pamphlet called *God's Revenge against Punning. Shewing the miserable Fates of Persons addicted to this Crying Sin, in Court and Town.* This began with an account of the succession of disasters with which the kingdom had been overtaken—fire, plague, the playhouses and their obscenities, whoring and popery displaced by Socinianism, Arianism, and Whistonianism—and now worst of all, this epidemic of punning. Such crimes will not be permitted to go on forever. Punishments are listed, and among the sufferers, one lord loses £500 at dice and displeases his grandmother, Colonel F[rowde] stutters, Eustace, Esq. "for the Murder of much of the King's *English* in *Ireland,* is quite depriv'd of his Reason, and now remains a Lively Instance of Emptiness and Vivacity," poor Daniel Button, "for the same Offense, depriv'd of all his Wits," and finally "A *Devonshire* Man of Wit, for only saying, in a jesting Manner, *I get Up-Pun a Horse,* instantly fell down, and broke his Snuff-Box and Neck, and lost the Horse." Colonel Frowde, the friend of Addison, was famous for his puns; Gay had already recorded one of them inspired by Rowe's *Lady Jane Grey.*[12] The reference to Budgell shows that the friendship with Gay—if Gay wrote this pamphlet—was cracking; it would collapse altogether, as we shall see, with the publication of *A Letter to a Buttonian Knight* in the following year. The downfall of the Devonshire Man of Wit is corroborated by a note in a letter Pope wrote to Teresa Blount, August 7, 1716: "Mr. Gay has had a fall from his horse and broken his fine snuffbox."[13]

The title of the pamphlet was suggested by one of the best-sellers of the day, John Reynolds's *The Triumphs of Gods*

[12] Pope, *Works,* VI, 227.

[13] *Ibid.,* IX, 265.

Revenge Against the Crying and Execrable sin of Murther, the sixth edition of which appeared in 1679. The book continued to flourish down through the years; its sequel, *God's Revenge Against the Crying and Execrable Sin of Adultery*, still more luridly illustrated than its predecessor, came out as late as 1708.

God's Revenge against Punning was signed mysteriously James Baker. There were evidently plenty of James Bakers about London in 1716. Mr. Aitken has found one, a famous gambler, known as the Knight of the Peak.[14] Mr. Sherburn has his James Baker, one of the publishers of the *White-Hall* and *St. James's Journals*.[15] Gay was apparently using this name as a pseudonym during the years 1716 and 1717. At least three prose pamphlets and one poem which seem to be his appeared with this signature during that time. One of these is in semi-serious support of Hoadly in the Bangorian controversy, *An Admonition Merry and Wise To the Famous Mr. Tr—p, on His Late Encomiums upon the Bishop of Bangor. For the Use of Young Divines.* Another is a parody of Eustace Budgell's rather pathetic *Letter to a Noble Lord*, called *A Letter to a Buttonian Knight.* The poem is *Horace, Epod. IV. Imitated By Sir James Baker, Kt. To Lord Cad*[*oga*]*n*, which Mr. Faber thinks almost certainly Gay's.[16]

God's Revenge against Punning was listed in the *Miscellanies* of 1742 with four other pamphlets as "by Mr. Pope and Mr. Gay." The copy in the British Museum is ascribed to Gay by a contemporary hand, the same hand, Mr. Faber points out, that wrote "By Gay" on the *Argument Proving . . . That the Present Mohocks and Hawkubites are the Gog and Magog, etc.* There seems to me no doubt that the pamphlet is Gay's.[17]

This attribution tempts one to imagine that with the idea in the air Arbuthnot, most faithful of the Scriblerians, would not let the shuttlecock fall to earth. At any rate, in November,

[14] G. A. Aitken, "Pamphlets by John Gay," *Athenaeum*, XLIX, 321 (Sept. 7, 1889).

[15] Sherburn, *The Early Career of Alexander Pope*, p. 183 n.

[16] *The Poetical Works of John Gay*, pp. xxxi and 638.

[17] I have not seen *A Letter from Sir J. B. . . . to Mr. P. . . . upon publishing a paper entitled "God's Revenge against Punning."* See *The Guardian*, No. 36 (April 22, 1713), for a paper on punning.

1716, appeared a six-page copy of verses that looks dangerously like his. It was called *An Heroi-Comical Epistle From a certain Doctor To a certain Gentle-Woman, In Defence of the most Antient Art of Punning.*

> Dear *Nanny*, all the World are running
> Stark-mad against our vein of *Punning;*
> But I regard not their *James Baker,*
> So much as barking *Cur* or *Quaker;*
> No, if he had been five times older,
> And bore ten *Knight-hoods* on his Shoulder,
> Your fair Example should weigh more
> With me upon the *Punning* Score
> Then all his Arguments, I hope,
> Brought from the *Devil,* or the *Pope.*
> And therefore I, in your defence
> Will prove a *Punn* both *Witt* and *Sense* . . .
>
> Ah! *Nanny, Nanny,* those were Days,
> When *Punning* bore the Bell and Bays;
> *Shakespear* and *Johnson,* in that Age
> Discharg'd their *Punns* around the Stage;
> And grave *Divines,* in Pulpit high,
> Popp'd of their *Punn-Artillery;*
> *Ambiguous* words by *Bishops* given,
> *Punn'd* honest Penitents to Heaven;
> They in his *own way* us'd to rub
> The sly dissembling *Beelzebub,*
> And he who did at first deceive
> By *doubtful words,* our Mother *Eve;*
> As *Preachers Punning* st[r]okes did heap on,
> Was fairely beat at *his own Weapon.*
> But, dearest *Nann,* I smell the bottom
> Of all our *Anti-punsters* (rott'em;)
> It is a *Papist-Jesuit* Plot,
> By *Tory Jacobites* begot . . .
>
> Yet they shall know that we can spy
> Their *Popish Plot* with *Half an Eye.*

All this is an amusing bagatelle. Whether the wits were responsible or not, the punning fashion caught on at Court,

a different place entirely from what it had been in the days of good Queen Anne. At least Leicester-House, over which the Princess Caroline and her lovely ladies presided, was different and much more lively. Dull formalities they abominated. Chesterfield gives a good account of the change, and incidentally of the popularity of puns.

> Balls, assemblies, and masquerades have taken the place of dull, formal visiting-days, and the women are more agreeable triflers than they were designed. Puns are extremely in vogue, and the license very great. The variation of three or four letters in a word breaks no squares, in so much that an indifferent punster may make a very good figure in the best companies.

Chesterfield himself was noted for puns, Lord Hervey for epigrams, and Bath for verses.[18]

II

While the court ladies and gentlemen were indulging their taste for puns and *double entendre* and from time to time inviting Gay and Pope to help them play the same game, the two friends—along with Arbuthnot apparently—were busy with a new Scriblerus project, the comedy, or perhaps one should say, satirical farce, *Three Hours after Marriage*. Pope's remark to Caryll, in a letter dated April 20, 1716, about the "new designs with some of my friends for a satirical work, which I must have formerly mentioned to you," may possibly refer to this play. In any case, that spring the three friends were frequently meeting to discuss a satirical project. Their talk would be as in the old days on false pretensions to learning, on odd relations between thesis and hypothesis, on the scrambled apparatus of pedantic scholarship. Their digressions would be in the manner of *A Tale of a Tub*, and their personalities, Dennis, Woodward, the Buttonian wits, and Curll's overdriven hacks of eloquence. Now Gay's only notable contribution so far to the lucubrations of Scriblerus had been dramatic, when he had pricked the bubbles of tragic verbosity in *The What d'ye Call*

[18] W. H. Wilkins, *Caroline the Illustrious, Queen-Consort of George II* (1901), I, 289.

It. He alone in the group had any talent for playwriting. As Mr. Sherburn has emphasized quite properly, his genius was for the ludicrous rather than for the strictly humorous or witty. His mind ran to absurdities, and as he joined in all this talk about Woodward with his curiosities, his Roman shield, his theories of the Universal Deluge and his faith in vomitions, about Dennis with his pet phrases, his thunder, his high seriousness and inelastic notions, he must have realized that all these ideas were by this time the pet property of the town, and that the time had come to make them central in comic representation. It is reasonably clear that the original idea and all the structural organization of the play were Gay's. Pope's letter to Parnell makes no reservations.

> I have been ever since December last in greater variety of business than any such man as you (that is, divines and philosophers) can possibly imagine a reasonable creature capable of. Gay's play, among the rest, has cost much time and long suffering to stem the tide of malice and party, that certain authors have raised against it.[19]

He proposes to use Parnell's *Zoilus*, at last in his hands, as a rebuke to the critics. Pope speaks of the play quite naturally as Gay's, and this to Parnell, who would know without any explaining the usual process of composition in that group.

I see no reason, moreover, to question the authenticity of the letter from Gay to Pope printed by William Ayre in his *Life of Pope* (1745). Here Gay ruefully acknowledged that he had misjudged the temper of his audience, and urged Pope not to worry about possible effects on his reputation and on Dr. Arbuthnot's for their known concern in the play. "I will, if any shame there be, take it all to myself, as indeed I ought, the motion being first mine, and never heartily approved of by you."[20]

This letter probably states plain fact, though we need not imagine any lack of zest on the part of the collaborators as they poured in suggestions of ridicule.

Having decided to use as a medium for Fossile's absurdities

[19] Pope, *Works*, VII, 464.

[20] *Ibid.*, VII, 419.

the idea of an "imaginary cuckold"[21]—if we can call a man that, who marries a whore and begins to suspect it—Gay had next to devise some connection between this main figure and a group of literary eccentrics that might include Dennis. To include him was essential after the appearance of his disgusting pamphlet, *A True Character of Mr. Pope,* in the preceding May. All this plotting was done with considerable skill. Gay was not satisfied to introduce a niece into Fossile's household, Phoebe Clinket, who, "when she should be raising Paste, is raising the Ghost in a new Tragedy"—she alone would have provided excuse for the introduction of Sir Tremendous, the critic—but, partly for these very real exigencies of plot, and partly for a second important reason, he created that maiden-coxcomb Plotwell to act as one of Mrs. Townley's admirers and at the same time as the sponsor for Phoebe's plays. Plotwell is to recommend her play for production, and the prime joke of all was possibly to inveigle Cibber into acting this very part, in which his own faults and follies as actor-manager of Drury Lane would be held up to the scornful amusement of the town. No doubt Gay still remembered against Cibber his own disappointment over *The Mohocks* back in 1712. He had indulged in his first ridicule of Dennis in the introduction to that farce, and had made fun of Cibber also in the dialogue appended to the epilogue of the same play.

The three main figures were then placed, and in a workable plot. Phoebe Clinket herself represented in the main Mrs. Centlivre, whose visit to Mrs. Crackenthorpe in the pages of *The Female Tatler* seems to have provided some satirical hints for the interviews with her manager.[22] Pope had recently been elaborating her virtues in his scatological warfare with Curll.[23]

[21] *Biographia Dramatica* (1812), III, 334. "The contrivance of the husband's jealousy is taken from *Le Cocu Imaginaire.*" *The Complete Key to Three Hours after Marriage* adds (p. 9) that the character of Lubomirski is taken from Ravenscroft's *The Anatomist: or, the Sham Doctor.*

[22] *The Female Tatler,* No. 69 (Dec. 14, 1709), and *The Tatler,* No. 91 (Nov. 8, 1709).

[23] See George Sherburn, "The Fortunes and Misfortunes of *Three Hours after Marriage,*" *Modern Philology,* XXIV, 91-109 (Aug., 1926). Mr. John Bowyer differs from Professor Sherburn on this point. See his unpublished Harvard Ph.D. thesis, *Susannah Freeman Centlivre* (1928), p. 103.

He blamed her for writing *The Catholick Poet or, Protestant Barnaby's Sorrowful Lamentation.* She was to be in one sense of the word the female virtuoso, not a new figure on the English stage by any means. Such a character had been transplanted from French comedy by Wright as early as 1693,[24] and had proved a moderately fruitful subject for satire not only on the stage but in *The Tatler* and elsewhere during the intervening years.

Beyond the four characters mentioned, the satire in Gay's play is general. He and his friends realized the danger that wrong applications might be made by the audience, and warned off the fools in their prologue.

> If any Fool is by our Satyr bit,
> Let him hiss loud, to show you all, he's hit.
> Poets make Characters, as *Salesmen* Cloaths,
> We take no Measure of your Fops and Beaus;
> But here all Sizes and all Shapes ye meet,
> And fit your selves, like Chaps in *Monmouth-street.*

Most authors, however, have found the oddities of their friends quite as irresistible as the vices of their enemies, and the depredations of the satirist are complex rather than simple. Mrs. Centlivre provided the main hints for the character of Phoebe, but Lady Winchelsea—friend though she was, of Pope at least—probably was also in mind.[25] Certainly the authors did not set out to satirize Mrs. Mead, but stories of her frivolities were current at this time, circulated, some said, by Woodward and his friends,[26] and there was danger that since no Mrs. Woodward was available, that particular cap might be fitted to the wife of another well-known physician, especially if Mrs. Oldfield chose, as some of the enemy pamphlets assert, to mimic

[24] Thomas Wright, *The Female Virtuosos* (1693). Gay rewrote this play under the title *No Fools like Wits* for production in 1721. See also Steele's treatment of Madonella in *The Tatler,* and Myra Reynolds's study of the whole subject, *The Learned Lady in England, 1650-1760* (New York, 1920).

[25] *Biographia Dramatica* (1812), III, 334. "Phoebe Clinket was said to be intended for the Countess of Winchelsea, who was so much affected with the itch of versifying that she had implements of writing in every room in her house that she frequented."

[26] Lester Beattie, *John Arbuthnot, Mathematician and Satirist* (Cambridge, Mass., 1935), p. 257 and note.

the mannerisms of that lady. Years later, the story of Bolingbroke's supposed commerce with Mrs. Mead was still remembered, and his equally indiscreet relations with the Walpole women.[27] Smedley gives out in his pamphlet recounting these scandals, *Gulliver Decypher'd*, that the three friends made *Three Hours after Marriage* a catchall for their personal grudges.

> Here each Party had a fine Opportunity of being reveng'd of their several adversaries; *Peter* abused the Wittlings of the Town, for not having Sense enough to taste his Mock-Heroicks and his Friend's Pastorals, who also introduced a Character to redicule his former Mistress or Lady Dutchess (as the moderns term it) for refusing to support him in his Extravagancies as formerly; and *Johnny* you may be sure, did not forget to set off his Antagonist in the most ridiculous light, and to *bespatter* his Wife in complaisance to the Secretary, who is said to have had reason to complain of her kindness, as well as her Husband's injuries to him.

This is certainly not what happened. If anyone of the Scriblerus Club enjoyed bespattering his enemies with scandal of this sort, it was Pope, and it must be admitted that before this play appeared he had settled well into the stride which would before long carry him jubilantly through the mud baths of *The Dunciad*. But Arbuthnot and Swift had always deprecated the introduction of personalities into satire, and Gay was too good-natured and even timorous to care much for that game. Pope once remarked to Spence: "Gay was remarkable for an unwillingness to offend the great, by any of his writings: he had an uncommon timidity upon him, in relation to anything of that sort. And yet you see what ill luck he had that way, after all his care not to offend."[28]

Certainly Gay would not think of satirizing the Duchess of Monmouth too obviously as the Countess of Hippokekoana. She had been a good friend to him, and still was. He had taken Pope to call on her, he had met her at a Somerset-house ball, and he must have been continually meeting her at Leicester House in attendance on the Princess. All we need to say is that

[27] *Gulliver Decypher'd* (1728), p. 7. [28] Spence, *Anecdotes*, p. 160.

Woodward's notions about emetics and vomitions had to be introduced, and a suitable patient provided. How the Duchess of Monmouth first came to be connected with that character in the play it is difficult to surmise. There are some points of resemblance, but none at this distance seems particularized. The enmity stirred up by the play no doubt led unfriendly critics to make just those attributions which they knew would be most embarrassing. This seems to be true of Edward Parker's notes in his *Complete Key to the new farce, call'd Three Hours after Marriage*. Every line reflects his animosity.

> The Countess of Hippokekoana is the Dutchess of M—h. To whom Gay was a Serving-man, and never hop'd for any higher preferment than holding a Plate at a side Board, till Pope took him into his Protection. Gay was born of honest, tho' mean Parentage, who by their Thrift and Industry made a shift to save wherewithal to Apprentice him out to a Stuff Man, but at the Expiration of his Time, being taken from that employ, he became Amanuensis to Aaron Hill, Esq; when that Gentleman set on Foot the Project of answering questions in a Weekly Paper, call'd, The British Apollo. Being dismist from Mr. Hill's Service, he was taken into the Family of the Lady Monmouth, whom he has thought fit to Banter, for no other Reason, but because it seems 'tis her Custom to take a Vomit once or twice a Week. It was upon his Dismission from this Lady's Service, that Pope took him to learn the Art of Rimeing, and Gay is now nam'd the Jabberer.

The Woodward-Dennis-Cibber figures remain, as Fossile, Sir Tremendous, and Plotwell, the satirical backbone of the play. They had already made themselves publicly ridiculous in one way or another, and public laughter was appropriate. About the rest of the characters we need speculate no further. Observation of odds and ends of character in friend and foe no doubt dropped into this well of imagination, and emerged later with a roguish twist towards absurdity that should have brought at least some tears of grateful laughter to the eyes of the audience.

The audience that appeared to greet Gay's play in Drury Lane on January 16 was no ordinary one, and the play got no

ordinary reception. At that time even a farce could be a serious matter for the author producing it, as stage history illustrates. The *Gentleman's Magazine* for March, 1732, complains, for instance, of the misbehavior of the footmen in the top gallery.

> After the Play is begun, we have often seen the noblest parts of it interrupted by their *Bear-Garden Quarrels* in the *Upper Gallery*. For these Reasons they ought to be banish'd out of the *Playhouse* forever. But perhaps this may be dangerous, considering they lately *rioted* an *Assembly* they could not be admitted to, and opposed the *Guards* that were plac'd for the Safety of their Masters. In the Streets we are affronted by them, while these Harbingers to the Chairmen thunder in your Ears, *Stand by! Clear the Way!* Agreeable to what Mr. *Gay* observes in his *Trivia*.[29]

Who can quell the footman's arrogance, especially when that arrogance is encouraged by his betters! We have already noticed that there were signs of organized opposition to *The What d'ye Call It*. The young gentlemen from the Inns of Court that time came prepared to hiss, since it had been reported that some of their favorites were to be ridiculed. They remained to laugh, fortunately for Gay. Most of the playwrights feared just that kind of organized opposition, "plotted Spleen" as William Taverner called it in the prologue to *The Artful Husband* (1716).

> Scatters fair Satyr, but no venome throws,
> And has been mighty tender of you Beaux;
> For lest he might incur your plotted Spleen,
> He brings no maiden Coxcomb on the Scene.

The reason for the riot that occurred on the first night of *Three Hours after Marriage* and continued with varying degrees of fervor through the seven nights of its performance was the enmity of an organized faction, or rather, of two factions combined for the occasion in an unholy alliance. Their viciousness in attack must have surprised even Pope, who was perhaps more responsible for it than his two friends. The excuse was not what it appeared to be. One could have understood the friends

[29] II, 661.

of Woodward—I suppose he had some—getting together to resent as emphatically as possible an attack on him. This was not what happened; the hostile pamphlets which dropped rapidly from the press during the next weeks mention Woodward rather casually as a distinguished scientist and cannot understand why anyone should attempt to annoy him. That was beside the point, and a shield to cover the real motive. Everyone knew that Woodward had made serious contributions to knowledge, but everyone knew also that he was "a vain, foolish, affected man," as Sir John Clerk puts it in his *Memoirs*.[30]

> I was likewise made acquainted with Doctor Woodward, who has a vast collection of natural Curiosities, as he himself, in my opinion, was the greatest Curiosity on earth, being a vain, foolish, affected Man. His natural History, however, is a book that deserves to be read, as it treats very well on Minerals and fossils.

The faction were not out to damn the play as champions of Woodward or of Dennis either. One might have understood also, perhaps, a violent reaction against the immodesties which the play had to offer with sufficiently blatant effrontery. This feature was castigated of course with hypocritical earnestness in the pamphlets. But this prudery also was a false front. The truth was that the bitter draught of Pope's lampoons, few though they had been at that date, had been already swallowed by enough of his compatriots to spread the fear of him abroad, until the minor writers of the day crowded together like sheep when a dog snaps at them. The wits at Button's found themselves herding with Curll's sad followers and equally eager in their damnation of anything that this terrible child might have a hand in. The war with Addison's clique and with Curll had been intensified early in the spring of 1716. This culminated in Pope's sending Addison the "Atticus" lines about June 1. Thereafter, though Burnet noted a truce in hostilities, Addison was not likely to have entertained very friendly feelings towards Pope, and when a report was circulated that the latter was coming out with a play "in which everyone of our modern Poets are

[30] *Memoirs of the Life of Sir John Clerk*, ed. J. M. Gray (1892), p. 127.

ridiculed,"[31] he could scarcely be expected to restrain the more bellicose spirits in his set from making plans to teach little Pope a lesson. As for Curll, 1716 was the big year for him. We have already noted something of the row that started with the publication of *Court Poems* and continued through that year and part of the next. When Gildon, Oldmixon, Mrs. Centlivre, and the rest of Curll's tribe, heard that Pope was busy with a play, they feared for their own skins. Bloody murders and circumcisions were bad enough, but worse might come; old Dennis immediately got busy on his *Remarks on Mr. Pope's Translation of Homer* (published February, 1717), and the rest of them banded together for mutual protection.

Needless to say, *Three Hours after Marriage* did not come up to Burnet's specifications; it was not a play in which all the modern poets were ridiculed. The principal satire in it was leveled at persons whom no one was particularly eager to defend. It was, on the other hand, a rollicking farce which succeeded in piling up one absurd situation upon another in a way that under ordinary circumstances would certainly have won applause. If, however, a playwright is going to indulge his sense for the ludicrous, if he brings in a crocodile as well as a mummy, makes farcical use of hoop-petticoats, writing-desks on maids' shoulders, potions for testing virginity, he had better contrive to work his audience into a sympathetic mood. If they hate him and all his works to begin with, each fresh absurdity will bring hoots of derision. That is apparently what happened. Gay had quite underestimated the bitterness of feeling which Pope had already excited, and in letting it be known that his friend was helping him with the play he had joined forces with an "author militant"[32] and made it impossible for his play to secure a hearing on its own merits.

[31] *The Letters of Thomas Burnet to George Duckett 1712-1722*, p. 119. See also Professor A. E. Case's article, "Pope, Addison, and the 'Atticus' Lines," *Modern Philology*, XXXIII, 187-193 (Nov., 1935).

[32] Pope styles himself "author militant" in a letter to Swift, June 20, 1716. "I can tell you no news, but what you will not sufficiently wonder at, that I suffer many things as an author militant, whereof in your days of probation you have been a sharer, or you had not arrived at that triumphant state you now deservedly enjoy in the Church" (Swift, *Letters*, II, 325).

The play was not a failure; it ran for seven consecutive nights, longer than any other play that season, and to full houses.[33] One early pamphlet, called *A Satyr on the Present Times*,[34] suggests that the play was thought a success.

> The *Cruel Gift* has won the Town's Applause,
> But we are always pleas'd without a Cause;
> We know no Reason *A*[*ddiso*]*n* goes down,
> Or *P*[*op*]*e, or R*[*ow*]*e* should bear away the Crown.
> Why *J*[*ohnso*]*n* durst a motly Drama bring,
> A Farce, a Play, a Pyrate and a King.

After the play was withdrawn, the Buttonian wits forsook catcalls for lampoons. The pamphlet which gives us most hints about what actually happened, though its information must of course be received with caution, is Breval's *Confederates*, which was published March 30, 1717, after the first high heats had subsided. This tells the story of the noisy first night, suggests the embarrassment of the actors, and Mrs. Oldfield's refusal to go on.

> Ill-judging Beauties (tho' of high Degree)
> Why did you force this wretched Part on me?
> And Thou, fat *Baroness*,[35] with Cheeks so Red,
> Whence came this Maggot in thy ancient Head?
> Oh! that I had (with Booth and Wilks combin'd)
> Obdurate as at first, not chang'd my Mind!
> Or, since I could not from the Task be freed,
> Had mimick'd Lady M[ohu]n, not Mrs. M[ea]d.

Breval makes very good sport of Gay's supposed distress.

> O that, contented with my Servile State,
> At some Bufet I still had held a Plate!
> Or, not attempting Things beyond my Reach,
> With honest Aaron Hill improv'd the *Beech!*

[33] *The Female Wits, or the Triumvirate of Poets* (1704), a satire on Mrs. Manley, Mrs. Trotter, and Mrs. Pix, has a preface beginning, "Though the Success of this Play has been such, as to need no Apology for the Publication of it; it having been Acted six Days running without Intermission. . ."

[34] *Daily Courant*, Jan. 23, 1717: "This day is published. . ."

[35] The fat Baroness was Lady Mohun, who also figures as one of the "gentle widows" in Leonard Welsted's *Palaemon to Caelia at Bath* (1717).

Well! to the Wits at Bernard's strait I'll run;
Unless he helps, by G—, we're all undone.

Then comes the story of Lintot's refusal to help, of the arrival at the last minute of a purse of gold from the Court ladies, Griffin, Bellenden, and Lepel, with the message of encouragement,

You, and your Brethren, we'll be glad to see,
In Street call'd *Gerrard*, when we drink our *Tea*.

With the aid of the money the house is packed and worse discomfiture avoided.

So far this account sounds as if it might be partly true. Breval's guesses about the division of labor among the authors are much less useful. His story about support from the maids of honor appeared first in *The Complete Key to Three Hours after Marriage*, by E. Parker, Philomath.[36] After making a violent attack on the obscenities of the play, the author of this pamphlet proceeds:

Such is the polite Dialogue of Messieurs *Arbuthnott*, *Pope*, and *Gay*, and the latter, modestly gives out, that for the fine *Entendre* and *Humour* in this *Scene*, the very *Ladies of Honour* rais'd him Four Hundred Guineas, to divide between him and his Partners, as some small Encouragement for them to proceed in their *Dramatical Studies*.

Evidently the audience was not all hostile, though the Court ladies had to pay for their enthusiasm by rather undesirable publicity. Giles Jacob, in his preface to *The Rape of the Smock*, makes a mock apology for his subject:

But now I think on 't, why should a poor *Author* be at the Trouble of making an Apology for writing upon a *Smock*, when the *Beauties* of this Age, look upon it as a want of Good Breeding, to Blush at a harmless *Double Entendre;* and I have seen, not long since, a *Front-Box* sit so *Unconcern'd* at the *smuttiest Performance*, that a *Stranger* would have been apt to question, whether there were One *Natural Complexion* among them All; and one would imagin, that Mother *Wybourn* (like some *Potentates*, when they are put

[36] Published Feb. 2, 1717. See *The Post-Boy* for that date.

to 't very hard for *Men*) had Listed all the *Sex*, from *Sixteen* to *Sixty*.

Welsted, too, had his insults on this score, in *Palaemon to Caelia at Bath*.[37]

> That Play, retorted *Fopling*, was so lewd,
> Ev'n Bullies blush'd, and Beaux astonish'd stood;
> But gentle Widows with soft Maids prevail,
> And kindly save the Alligator's tail.

The point of obscenity was raised by Sir Richard Blackmore in his "Essay on Polite Writing," published within a month after the production of *Three Hours after Marriage*.[38] He was no doubt anxious to do what he could to repay Gay's compliments in his *Epistle to the Right Honourable the Earl of Burlington* already mentioned.

This was the line too, as might have been expected, that Addison's criticism took, and he had much to say on the subject, so much that Gay angrily prepared a reply, which he finally decided not to publish. That story appears in Spence.

> Mr. Addison and his friends had exclaimed so much against Gay's "Three Hours after Marriage," for obscenities, that it provoked him to write "A Letter from a Lady in the City to a Lady in the Country," on that subject. In it he quoted passages which had been most exclaimed against, and opposed other passages to them from Addison's and Steele's plays. These were aggravated in the same manner that they had served his, and appeared worse. Had it been published it would have made Addison appear ridiculous, which he could bear as little as any man. I therefore prevailed upon Gay not to print it, and have the manuscript now by me.[39]

There were other causes for anger very soon. Cibber seems to have taken a good while to wake up to the fact that some of the lines he had been uttering contained hidden gibes at his own foibles. Some two weeks after Gay's play was withdrawn,

[37] Published March 7, 1717, *The Post-Boy*, 2d ed., March 13, 1717. See *The Daily Courant* for that date.

[38] In *Essays on Several Subjects*, Vol. II, published March 26, 1717. See *The Evening Post* of that date.

[39] Spence, *Anecdotes*, p. 202.

he got a petty revenge by taking a fling at the mummy and crocodile in a revival of *The Rehearsal*.

Thus upon the coming of the two Kings of Brentford from the clouds into the throne again, instead of what his part directed, he said, "Now, Sir, this revolution I had some thoughts of introducing by a quite different contrivance; but, my design taking air, some of your sharp wits I found had made use of it before me; otherwise I intended to have stolen one of them in the shape of a mummy, and t'other in that of a crocodile.[40]

This performance annoyed both Gay and Pope excessively. According to the story which Cibber told long after,[41] Pope came backstage after the play, spluttering with rage and insisting that Cibber withdraw those lines from future productions, whereupon Cibber calmly assured him that so long as the play continued to be acted he would not fail to repeat the words over and over again. Gay also took part in the squabble, and the report got about that he had attempted—no one felt sure with what results—to cane Cibber. Before February was out, and while the stories were still hot under the tongue, there appeared with the usually hostile imprint of James Roberts a pamphlet called *A Letter to Mr. John Gay, Concerning His late* FARCE, *Entituled, A Comedy*. The dedication is to Wilks, Cibber, and Booth, and supports the notion of inside opposition to the play from the managers themselves.

Gentlemen, Since you had so much good Nature as to admit a *Play* into your House against your Judgments, and so much Wit as to suffer it to be ridiculed upon the same Stage afterwards; like a Rogue that is punished upon the same Spott where he committed his Murder; I have thought no Persons so proper *Patrons* of the following Letter as yourselves. You had too much Manners to dispute the Performance before the Town had given its Opinion, and too much Sense to stand out when every body had Damned it, but the *Authors*.

Now this *Letter* presently goes on to describe Cibber's ridicule of the play in *The Rehearsal* and its unfortunate results.

[40] Supplement to the *Universal Magazine*, XXXV, 340.

[41] *A Letter from Mr. Cibber to Mr. Pope* (1742), pp. 18-19.

Gentlemen, It is your Part to learn Instruction from this Scene of *Poetical Justice,* for it is a sad thing to fall into the Hands of a *Boxing-Bard,* who proves his *Wit* as the *Saints* of the last Age did their *Religion,* from convincing *Blows* and reforming *Knocks.* Less Terrible were his *Alligator, Crocodile,* and *Mummy,* and therefore it is high time for you to clear behind the *Scenes,* as well as upon the *Stage.*

Breval's *Confederates* also prints the story of Gay's valor as "A Congratulatory Poem; Inscribed to Mr. Gay, on his Valour and Success behind Drury-Lane Scenes."

> But now our Modern Bards can fight
> As Bravely, as they Wisely write,
> And dare, to show that they're stout-hearted,
> Draw Sword, when certain to be parted.

The letter which "George Paston" quotes tells the story with an air of assuredness which argues truth, though we may regret that in this version Gay, though equally courageous, is less successful.

To touch upon the polite world before I conclude, I don't know whether you heard, before you went out of town, that *The Rehearsal* was revived, not having been acted before these ten years, and Cibber interlarded it with several things in ridicule of the last play, upon which Pope went up to him and told him he was a rascal, and if he were able he would cane him; that his friend Gay was a proper fellow, and if he went on in his sauciness he might expect such a reception from him. The next night Gay came accordingly, and, treating him as Pope had done the night before, Cibber very fairly gave him a fillip on the nose, which made them both roar. The Guards came and parted them, and carried away Gay, and so ended this poetical scuffle.[42]

Was ever a play so notorious? From the time when Charles Johnson called it "long-labour'd Nonsense" in the prologue to *The Sultaness,*[43] to the time, let us say, when Arthur Murphy

[42] George Paston, *Mr. Pope* (1909), I, 197. See also *Biographia Dramatica* (1812), III, 334.

[43] Acted in Drury Lane, Feb. 25, 1717. See *Daily Courant,* Feb. 25, 1717. "At the Theatre-Royal in Drury-Lane, this present Monday, being the 25th of February, will be presented a New Tragedy, call'd the Sultaness."

changed the title of his old play, *What we must all come to*, first acted 1764, to *Three Weeks after Marriage* (1776) in the effort to stimulate public curiosity, the journals and miscellanies were full of references to the play, and nearly all of them were hostile. Nothing of Gay's, except *The Beggar's Opera*, attracted the same amount of publicity. The reason is not far to seek. Before 1728, the references were rude perhaps, but they reflected at least an amused tolerance. Moreover, in them Gay usually received main credit for the work. After 1728, the viciousness of the attack was obvious, and the victim sought was Pope rather than Gay. The dunces were up in arms, and since this play had obvious faults, and Pope was known to have had some share in its composition, they magnified that share; because of their eagerness in attack they gave the play a wholly factitious importance.

Note, for instance, the pleasantly ironic temper of the pamphlet *John Shuttle and his wife Mary* (1720), which on page 22 discussed the authors of the day, and Gay among them.

> Did ever Euripides write such a tragedy as the fall of Siam? Or either Aristophanes, Terence, or Plautus, a Comedy equal to the Three Hours after Marriage? . . . Can Theocritus's Pastorals be compar'd to the Shepherd's Week? . . . Ovid and Tibullus must give place to the soft Performances of Mr. Gay; Martial to the Quaintness of Sir James Baker; and the Roman Satyrist to the City Bard.

Again, *The Weekly Journal or Saturday's Post* for August 25, 1722, contained the following titbit of gossip for theatregoers. It may of course refer to Pope, but in any case the rancor of later attacks was absent.

> It is reported, that a certain Poet, of top Reputation, has lately declared to the Governors of the Theatre in *Drury-Lane*, that he will not comply with their Request, lately made, to write for the Stage; unless they will condescend to advance him a Premium of £500, on which Terms he will give them a second Part of that incomparable Droll, call'd, *Three Hours after Marriage:* And the Managers of the Play-House, it is thought, (through their superior Judgment) will vouchsafe to compliment the Poet with his extensive

Demands, rather than the Town shall be, this next Winter, without some uncommon, and more than ordinary, polite Entertainment.

In the same year was published *A Monthly Packet of Advices from Parnassus, Establish'd by Apollo's express Authority, And sent to England: With the Learning, Writings, Politicks, and Manners of the Age.* The author of this, for a wonder, seemed quite able to detach Pope's name from *Three Hours after Marriage* and to damn that play, along with Ambrose Philips's *The Briton,* at the same time that he paid Pope the highest compliments.

But when we come to more polite Studies, and to the Sacrifices most grateful to *Apollo,* those beautiful Spots of the Garden have left no Footsteps behind. Three Wits clubb'd together, cannot make a Play equal to the worst of *Shadwel's.* Tragedy is lost. The *Briton,* and *Hibernia Freed,* are our late Productions. How flaccid and faint is every Line; as bad as the Translation of an *Italian* Opera. The Authors write with no more Spirit than half starv'd Men. *Pope,* indeed, keeps up the Face of an *English* Poet. Oh! could he write what he thinks, in Numbers sweet as those he has already sent into the World; then he would, like *Oldham,* scourge a wicked Age, and trace the Muses Miseries to their Fountain Head.[44]

Pope was presently to do just this, and, in the mass of pamphlets that assailed him, comments on *Three Hours after Marriage* nearly always found a place, and the opprobrium cooked up was nearly always plastered on him instead of on Gay. *Gulliver Decypher'd,* to take but one example, facetiously recounts the history of the triumvirate. Arbuthnot's advance to favor at Court is first sketched by way of parable.

The next Person our physician grew intimate with, was a little deformed crossgrained fellow, but very ingenious and witty, and in great favour with the *Chief Secretary* [Bolingbroke]. His talent was Rhyming, and 'tis said he raised a great fortune by turning an old Collection of Ballads into the language of the Country, tho' some are so malicious as to say, that he did not really understand them himself, but got certain Druids to explain them, and so put them

[44] This pamphlet bears no date. Ambrose Philips's *The Briton* was produced in 1722.

off for his own; this Wight, who they named *Peter*, had an intimate friend, a very harmonious fellow, and an excellent Bagpipe player, to which he us'd to set sonnets of his own making in the Pastoral kind; he was the freed man of a certain Lady of great Quality, who had given him his liberty for several good Services; and her Ladyship being after troubled with fits of the Mother, had often occasion for Dr. *Johnny* who then being in vogue, nobody could be modishly sick without him.

The author goes on to describe how the authors "clubbed the Farce" to avenge their private spite, how war followed in the theatre and out, and how finally "Dr. *Plausible* [Mead] and his party raised such power as to defeat their Enemies."[45]

By this time the critics had a thesis to maintain about Pope, and *Three Hours after Marriage* was the best available material by way of example. They one and all asserted the treacherous nature of the man as a friend: double-natured like an ancient centaur, as Dennis put it, a Jesuitical professor of truth, a base and foul pretender to candor, one whom you had best avoid, he'll play you a foul trick else. Addison had some little excuse for this feeling. The Meads never shared it, nor Lady Winchelsea.

Into all this scabrous mess of quarrelsome authors Gay was precipitated, and the effect on his reputation was appreciable. If he had cared to attempt preserving these dirty flies in amber, he might just conceivably have won respect from angry men effectively castigated. He had no wish to do this, and the angry men, intent on piling all the active guilt on Pope's shoulders, frequently found nothing left for Gay but the fool's cap he had talked about in his prologue. This attitude is manifestly unfair.

[45] *Gulliver Decypher'd* (1728), pp. 3 ff. It is impossible to imagine that Dr. Mead could have been involved in the violent attack on the play, since his relations with Pope continued to be friendly. For other references to *Three Hours after Marriage*, consult: *The Authors of the Town; A Satire: Inscribed to the Author of the Universal Passion* (n.d.), p. 12; *Characters of the Times; or, an Impartial Account of the Writings, Characters, Education, &c. of several Noblemen and Gentlemen, libell'd in a Preface to a late Miscellany publish'd by P[o]pe and S[wi]ft* (1728), p. 20; *Sawney and Colley, A Poetical Dialogue: Occasioned by A Late Letter from the Laureat of St. James's, to the Homer of Twickenham. Something in the Manner of Dr. Swift* (n.d., after 1733), p. 20; *Blast upon Blast, and Lick for Lick . . .* by Captain H—s Vinegar (1742).

The play is so much better than most plays from which the London public suffered in those days, that one is continually astonished at the lack of recognition which has been its fate down to quite recent times. The burden of personalities we would object to; and there is some little suggestion in a letter from Pope to Tonson that the authors were slightly conscious of that mistake. Pope wrote: "Mr. Gay and myself think it absolutely necessary that you should cancel that Leaf in which the Epilogue is printed, or if it falls out wrong, cancell both leaves rather than fail."[46]

The play was not revived until 1737, nor reprinted separately till a Dublin issue appeared in 1761.[47]

III

Whatever Gay made out of this play in addition to the £43 2*s*. 6*d*. Lintot gave him for the copyright must have been slight recompense for all the embarrassment it cost him, and it is refreshing to turn from this unpleasantness to brighter matters in the poet's life, to remember for instance that there were many loyal friends about him still, on whom he could count at awkward moments. The friends who had gathered about Swift in more prosperous days were at the moment busy helping Prior, who, like his former master, the Earl of Oxford, had been confined on a charge of treason and only recently released. Four days before *Three Hours after Marriage* appeared, Erasmus Lewis was writing to Swift:

Our friend Prior, not having had the vicissitude of human things before his eyes, is likely to end his days in as forlorn a state as any other poet has done before him, if his friends do not take more care of him than he has done of himself. Therefore, to prevent the evil, which we see is coming on very fast, we have a project of printing

[46] British Museum *Addit. MSS.* 28275. f. 240.

[47] *Three Hours after Marriage, a comedy,* by Gay, Pope, and Arbuthnot: To which is added, never before Printed, a key, explaining the most difficult passages in this comedy. Also a letter, giving an account of the origin of the quarrel between Colley Cibber, Pope and Gay (Dublin, 1761). The *Key,* however, was the same old one. The play was revived in 1737 for two performances, and again in 1746 for three. See Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of Early Eighteenth Century Drama 1700-1750* (Cambridge, 1925), p. 331.

his Solomon, and other poetical works, by subscription; one guinea to be paid in hand, and the other at the delivery of the book. He. Arbuthnot, Pope, and Gay, are now with me, and remember you. It is our joint request, that you will endeavour to procure some subscriptions.[48]

Prior was a friend worth helping, and Gay was doubtless active in promoting this project. Parnell, on the other hand, with no financial worries of his own, was anxious to help Gay, and told Pope to pay over the copy-money for *Zoilus* (£16 2*s*. 6*d*.) to him.[49]

Sir Samuel Garth also was encouraging Gay to translate more Ovid, and finding a place for his work in the magnificent folio finally issued in July. The list of translators in this work includes Dryden, Addison, Pope, Congreve, and Rowe, to mention five out of a list of eighteen.[50] Gay did most of the Ninth Book. Translating Ovid seems to have been one of Gay's pet amusements. His *Arachne* from Book VI had already found a place in Lintot's *Miscellany* (1712), and another of his fragments, this time from Book VII, had appeared late in 1716 in a volume of the *Metamorphoses* which generally goes under Sewell's name, and which apparently was thrust on the market by Curll and some of his confreres to provide a cheap running-mate for Garth's big volume. Garth's real friendliness for Gay at this time and his respect for his abilities appear in a little poem which Pope printed in *Poems on Several Occasions,* issued by Lintot in July, 1717.[51]

Anacreontick to Mr. Gay. *By Dr.* Garth.
When fame did o'er the spacious plains
The lays she once had learn'd, repeat;
All listen'd to the tuneful strains,
And wonder'd who cou'd sing so sweet.

[48] Swift, *Letters*, II, 360.

[49] Published in May, 1717, under Pope's supervision. See Pope's letter to Parnell (Pope, *Works*, VII, 464).

[50] See Pope, *Sandy's Ghost*, which Smedley called "a starched, forc'd Riot, on many Noblemen and Gentlemen concern'd in Dr. *Garth's* fine Translation of *Ovid's Metamorphosis.*" See Dean Smedley's *Gulliveriana* (1728), p. xxxviii.

[51] See the article by Professor A. E. Case in the *London Mercury* (Oct., 1924) and Mr. Norman Ault's edition, *Pope's Own Miscellany* (1935).

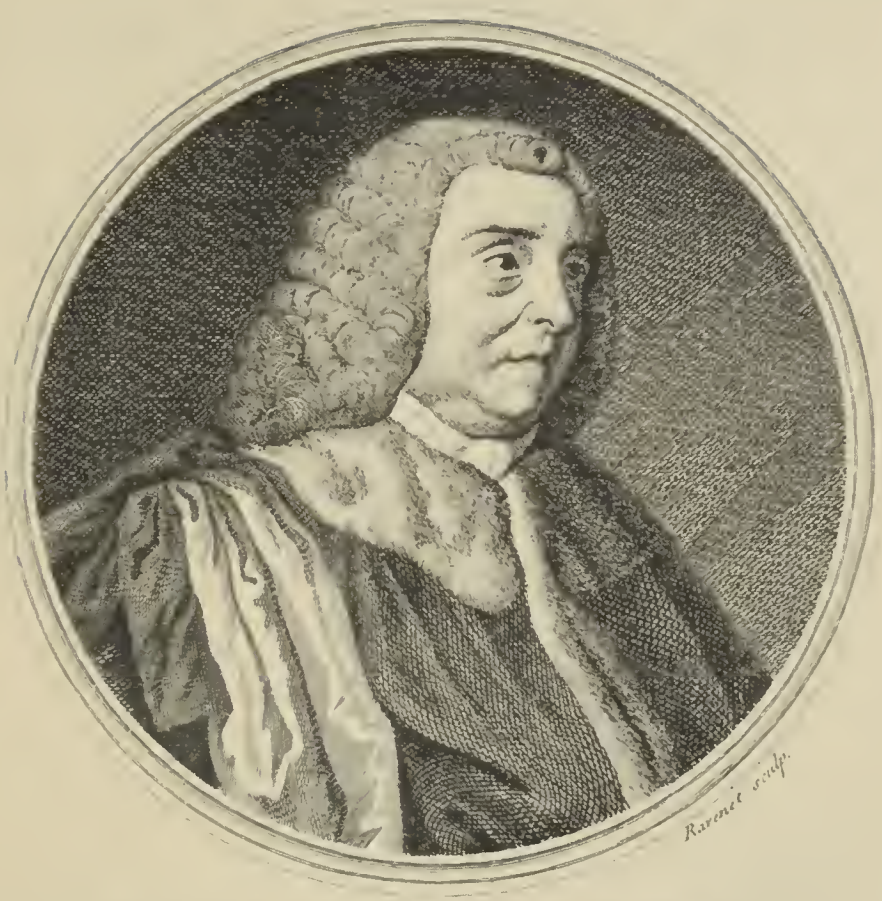
'Twas thus. The graces held the lyre,
Th' harmonious frame, the muses strung,
The loves and smiles compos'd the choir,
And *Gay* transcrib'd what *Phoebus* sung.

The poets remained faithful to Gay, and the great world still opened its doors to him, though none of his friends had yet found the post for him he needed so badly. He had once again high hopes. Along in December, before *Three Hours after Marriage* appeared, Pope wrote to Martha Blount: "Gay is well at court, and more in the way of being served than ever. However, not to trust too much to hopes, he will have a play acted in four or five weeks, which we have driven a bargain for."[52]

One fancies that this play may not have helped his court projects, for though the Court ladies found *Three Hours after Marriage* good entertainment, the Princess herself was probably not amused. In any case, when Gay next tried to gain her favorable attention, it was with a play of a vastly different sort. At the moment he leaned the harder on some of his other distinguished friends. Burlington still delighted in his company, and his new friend, William Pulteney, invited him to spend the summer with him and his family traveling in France. In April, Pulteney had been dismissed from his office as Secretary of War and had followed Walpole into retirement to make way for the Stanhope-Sunderland-Cadogan set. He may have thought Gay needed cheering up, or he may have needed cheering up himself—the latter more probably, in spite of Dr. Johnson's remark about Gay's being "sunk in dejection." The journey was planned for early June. Pope wrote to Caryll on June 7, 1717: "I may now think of seeing Ladyholt, though not a line of my next year's task is writ. As to Gay, he is just upon the wing for Aix-la-Chapelle, with Mr. Pulteney, the late Secretary."[53]

Evidently the party did not move until after July 6, as Pope wrote Parnell on that date that Gay was going into France next week with Pulteney.[54] It may well be that the delay was caused by Pulteney's interest in an attack on Lord Cadogan which was being engineered at this time. Cadogan's enemies had charged

[52] Pope, *Works*, IX, 271. [53] *Ibid.*, VI, 244. [54] *Ibid.*, VII, 467.



PULTENEY Earl of *BATH.*

An engraving by Simon-François Ravenet, the elder, from a portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds. Courtesy of the British Museum

him with embezzlement, but the attack on him was in the main malicious, and largely caused by Jacobite hatred of the part he had played in suppressing the rebels of 1715. Pulteney probably hoped that the scandal might be strong enough once again to upset the Whig balance, and doubtless he had no wish to be in France when his country needed him. In this affair, Gay provided amusement for the Pulteneys and ammunition for the guns of Cadogan's enemies by scattering about London streets a broadside lampoon on his lordship, called *Horace, Epod. IV. Imitated By Sir James Baker, Kt. To Lord Cad—n.* Gay twitted Cadogan with his pride in newly-acquired honors, called his family antecedents into very sad question, and even threw doubt on his reputation as a soldier. The reference to Marlborough was by no means polite.

> Slaves think thee an important Lord,
> In Senate and at Council-Board,
> In Camps a Son of Thunder;
> But sure, as I'm a valiant Knight,
> If *Marlb'rough* taught thee not to Fight,
> He taught thee how to Plunder.

One reason for the violence of these lines, for the insult to Marlborough also, was that Marlborough and Cadogan were probably the most rabid of all the enemies of the old administration in their persecution of Lord Oxford, Gay's former patron, so violent that when they found that impeachment proceedings would be dropped by the Lords they withdrew from the House to avoid voting.[55]

Neither the machinations of Pulteney nor the poetry of Gay could upset Cadogan, and the two friends, both without jobs, set out for France early in July for a visit that lasted well on into November. We hear of them in October in a letter from Pope to the Duchess of Hamilton, with whom he seems to have been especially intimate at this time, and the reference suggests that Gay was in high spirits.

> No, madam, despise great bears, such as Gay; who now goes by the dreadful name of *The Beast of Blois*, where Mr. Pulteney and

[55] Swift, *Letters*, II, 391.

he are settled, and where he shows tricks gratis, to all the beasts of his own country (for strangers do not yet understand the voice of the beast). I have heard from him but once, Lord Warwick twice, Mrs. Lepell thrice: if there be any that has heard from him four times, I suppose it is you.[56]

Gay wrote little more than letters during this trip. Pope repeats Gay's complaint from Aix that writing was not good with the waters, and compliments him on his *Epistle to William Lowndes,* which he had sent over to Lord Burlington.[57] This is really one of Gay's most delightfully witty occasional pieces. It praises the virtues of Lowndes as "Author of that celebrated treatise in folio, called the Land-Tax Bill," compares him favorably with poets and historians.

> Ev'n *Button's* Wits are nought compar'd to thee,
> Who ne'er were known or prais'd but o'er his Tea,
> While Thou through *Britain's* distant isle shalt spread,
> In ev'ry *Hundred* and *Division* read.

Pope's letter referring to this poem (dated November 8, 1717) was the only one he sent to Gay that summer. We learn from it that Gay had kept up a correspondence not only with Lord Warwick and Mrs. Lepel, but with the Duchess of Hamilton, Lord Stanhope (afterwards Earl of Chesterfield) and Mrs. Bellenden. Evidently Lord Burlington had visited the Pulteneys, and had some pretty compliments for Mrs. Pulteney. Last of all, in this letter Pope wishes Gay "joy of the birth of the young prince, because he is the only prince we have, from whom you have had no expectations and no disappointments."

Pope says nothing of Gay's return, and we have no evidence to help us on this point. He may have stayed in France through that winter, but the only hint to support this comes from a letter in the *Portland MSS,* and the Gay mentioned in them may not be the poet at all. On May 23, 1718, H. Winnington writes from Vienna to his uncle, the Earl of Oxford: "I have endeavoured in my travels to find something curious, and of your

[56] Pope, *Works,* IX, 462. [57] *Ibid.,* VII, 420.

Lordship's *goût*. There is a description of Languedoc, written by Mr. Bavil, with another little book of the Canal, which Mr. Gay will remit into your hands."[58] It is just possible that the books were purchased in Paris, when Pulteney and Gay were amusing themselves there, and Winnington found it convenient to entrust them to Gay for safe delivery.

That the two friends had a good time in Paris is clear from the poem Gay wrote to commemorate the visit, *An Epistle to the Right Honourable William Pulteney, Esq.* The subject of the poem is the frivolities of the French. Like most Englishmen of his own time and later times, he felt that all Frenchmen were of the *petit-maître* kind, the men vain and the women frivolous. The poem is full of the traveler's usual comparisons between what he sees abroad and how we do it back home. The court, the parks, the city streets, the opera, pass in review, for after all,

> Shall he (who late *Britannia's* city trod,
> And led the draggled Muse, with pattens shod,
> Through dirty lanes, and alleys doubtful ways)
> Refuse to write, when *Paris* asks his lays!

The manners of the French, especially their conceit, are treated rather scandalously, but their patriotism, their science, and their literature are remembered with respect.[59] The name of the great Archbishop of Cambray—a favorite with Pulteney—reminds Gay of maxims of state. The King must protect his people, and scorn to rule a wretched race of slaves. Then the poet breaks forth in praise of England in a manner which later, with Thomson and his followers, became all too common.

> Happy, thrice happy shall the monarch reign,
> Where guardian laws despotic power restrain!
> There shall the ploughshare break the stubborn land,
> And bending harvests tire the peasant's hand:
> There liberty her settled mansion boasts,
> There commerce plenty brings from foreign coasts.

[58] Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Portland MSS* (1899), V, 560.

[59] On English notions about the French at this time, see a letter from James Craggs to Pope, Sept. 2, 1716 (Pope, *Works*, X, 173), and another from Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Oct., 1718 (*ibid.*, IX, 407).

O *Britain,* guard thy laws, thy rights defend,
So shall these blessings to thy sons descend!

By June 1718, and probably much before that, Gay was back in England,[60] spending the summer with his friend Pope at Stanton Harcourt, Lord Harcourt's place near Oxford. Pope was working hard at his translation and had accepted this old half-disused house in the effort to get away from interruptions. Lord Harcourt himself lived at Cokethorpe, not far away. The friends found themselves distracted occasionally by invitations to Cokethorpe, to Oxford, and to Lord Bathurst's place in Cirencester. Over the last, Gay grew so enthusiastic that he produced a poem about it, which doubtless pleased the owner but has not come down to us. Erasmus Lewis, Lord Bathurst's prose-man, was frequently there also, as was Prior, the verse-man. Lewis proclaimed that he disliked Oakley Wood because there was no water about.

A wood! quoth Lewis; and with that
He laughed and shook his sides so fat:
His tongue, with eye that masked his cunning,
Thus fell a reas'ning, not a running.
Woods are, not to be too prolix,
Collective bodies of straight sticks . . .

The woods for Gay were as romantic as the cave of Montesinos; he planted them with myrtles and peopled them with nymphs,

[60] The verses recently sold at Sotheby's may date from this period. See *The Poetical Works of John Gay,* p. 215.

My Dear Belladine
O're a Glass of Wine
We send you this line.
On Purpose to tell
You Miss Lepell
We are all very well.

If news we should send you from Canterbury
That news to be sure you would think is a lye
And therefore we'll say what before you did know
That we are your Servants wherever we go.

Canterbury, Saturday.

Ann Pulteney.
Wm. Pulteney
J. Gay.

and, whatever the prose-men of the age might say, he proposed to make posterity believe that there was water in Oakley Wood.[61]

From Oxford too came friends and invitations. Dr. William Stratford, Canon of Christ Church and friend of Lord Oxford, soon found them. On July 31, he was writing to Edward Harley: "Your friend Steady, being so eminently ingenious, has got the company of two wits for his entertainment, Pope and Gay. Lord Harcourt lends them Stanton Harcourt to live in this summer."[62]

Early in July, Mrs. Pope joined them. During this month occurred the sad accident which Gay and Pope straightway made famous. Two young lovers were caught out in the fields in a storm, and while attempting to shelter themselves near a haystack were killed by lightning. The same account of this incident was sent by Gay and Pope by the same post, August 9, to Fortescue and to Martha Blount, though Martha Blount's letter was written, Pope says, three days earlier. Bathurst also got a copy at the same time, for which he returned thanks a few days later "to Mr. Gay and you." Probably both the men had a hand in the composition.[63] The "melancholy novel" seems to have excited the proper emotions in all who read it. Pope wrote an epitaph and sent that to Atterbury and Caryll and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. Atterbury and Caryll praised the fine sentiments, and considered the lovers scarcely unhappy, since their disaster had made them forever famous in Pope's verses. Goldsmith used the story in *The Vicar of Wakefield* and for a long time no collection of model letters was complete without it.[64] The only discord in this chorus of praise was Lady Mary's re-

[61] Pope, *Works*, VIII, 322.

[62] Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Portland MSS* (1899), VII, 239.

[63] Actually, this description was first published both by J. Wright and by Curll in 1737 as a letter from Gay to Fortescue, dated Aug. 3, three days earlier than Pope's to Martha Blount. See *Court Poems* (1719 ed.), *Letters of Mr. Alexander Pope* (1737), William Ayre, *Life of Pope* (1745). Cf. *The Tatler*, No. 82, and "'Twas when the Seas were Roaring," and Thomas Parnell, *The Hermit*.

[64] For example, *Letters On the most Common, as well as Important Occasions in Life* (1757). This work ran through several editions, and it was thought that the introduction was contributed by Goldsmith.

turn letter. Her remarks and the mock epitaph she sent reduce the whole framework of romance dangerously near absurdity.[65]

One wonders how seriously also she took the grim Gothicism of Pope's description of the old house, with which he had favored both her and the Duke of Buckingham at this time. Perhaps the old place bred melancholy. In any case, soon after August 14, the friends were ready to exchange it for Lord Bathurst's country seat in Cirencester, which the owner had lent them for the time. Pope had hoped to persuade the Blount sisters to accompany him there and offered to meet them, along with his mother and Gay, and show them Blenheim en route. These plans, however, collapsed.

> The minute I find there is no hope of you, I fly to the wood. . . . What I shall gather from thence I know not, except nuts, which I believe Gay and I shall oftener crack, than jokes. But you shall hear more of our life there, when we have experienced it longer.[66]

Information about Gay's affairs during the months that follow is remarkably scarce. Late that autumn he produced *A Letter to a Buttonian Knight,* already mentioned in connection with the other Sir James Baker pamphlets. This one was a parody of Eustace Budgell's *A Letter to the Lord xxxx from Eustace Budgell, Esq.* It is unpleasant to observe that the friendship between Budgell and Gay had so far cooled that Gay could satirize Budgell's rather pitiful attempt to explain his conduct in Ireland. But Budgell was getting to be a very difficult person in these days. Age and prosperity had not improved him, and misfortune would presently complete the process of disintegration. Gay's pamphlet also ridicules the two most notorious projects of the time, Steele's Fish-Pool Scheme and Aaron Hill's Beechmast. We may presume that these men too had by this time drifted almost completely out of Gay's circle. By the end of the year, death had removed three more dear friends from the group, Parnell, Rowe, and Garth. Pope wrote to Jervas on December 12, 1718:

[65] Pope, *Works,* IX, 409.

[66] *Ibid.,* IX, 288.

At present I consider you bound in by the Irish sea, like the ghosts in Virgil,

Tristi palus inamabilis undâ
Alligat, et novies Styx circumfusa coërcet!

and I cannot express how I long to renew our old intercourse and conversation, our morning conferences in bed in the same room, our evening walks in the park, our amusing voyages on the water, our philosophical suppers, our lectures, our dissertations, our gravities, our reveries, our fooleries, or what not? This awakens the memory of some of those who have made a part in all these. Poor Parnell, Garth, Rowe! You justly reprove me for not speaking of the death of the last: Parnell was too much in my mind, to whose memory I am erecting the best monument I can.[67]

Arbuthnot was still at hand, and always eager to give Gay hints for one poem or another. During the summer of 1718, he had been in Rouen and Paris for three months, and after his return wrote Swift (October 14) about some of his experiences, particularly about a beautiful Irish lady, named Nelly Bennet, whom he had had the honor to present at the French court. Everyone was delighted with her, and the boy-King ordered the hussar to bring her the royal cat to kiss. Arbuthnot was certainly the author of this pretty story, but it is doubtful whether he was the author of the pretty *Ballad* which was based on it, and which presumably was written about this time. The *Ballad* has been recently damned as "an extraordinarily coarse and insinuating poem"[68]—one hesitates to dispute so emphatic a pronouncement—and its authorship remains uncertain. If Arbuthnot could write as good verses as these, it is too bad we have no more like them. There is a song-lilt to them that makes one look for the music. The worst instance of obscenity in them is a fling at French morals, such as we find in the *Epistle to Pulteney;* another is witty enough to be excused. Now Gay, as Swift makes clear, was accustomed to talk over his poetical projects with Arbuthnot. Arbuthnot loved to give hints. Moreover, Gay was busy at this time writing some of his very best songs,

[67] *Ibid.*, VIII, 27.

[68] Lester Beattie, *John Arbuthnot, Mathematician and Satirist* (1935), p. 287.

and I must insist that there is quality in this poem to rank it high among them. One should remember also that Gay had been in France not long before, and the casual familiarity with the French scene and language apparent in the poem is only what might be expected from him. Is it not more probable also that the fourth stanza with its joke about what some French papas do would come more naturally from Gay as he visualized the scene after Arbuthnot's description than from Arbuthnot himself? At least, we can agree that nastiness gives way to obscene fun if we think of Gay writing the lines to tease his friend, rather than of Arbuthnot turning over such an idea in his own mind. I have no doubt that Gay wrote the verses.

IV

The summer of 1719 found Gay once more traveling on the Continent. It is impossible now to discover who paid the bills. He was at this time and for the following three or four years particularly high in favor with Lord Burlington, and he may have found ways to make himself useful to this powerful friend or to his family on their journeys here and there. Speculation on the point is useless. All we have to tell us what Gay was doing that summer is a letter he wrote to Mrs. Howard from Dijon on September 8, 1719.[69] He had been, he says, very ill with a fever which confined him for a month at Spa. That at least puts the date of his departure from England back to July or earlier. The letter continues with some amusing notes on French manners, a pretty story about the English tourist who wanted to know whether he had ever met John Gay, and some account of his plans. Tomorrow he will set out for Lyons, Montpellier, Paris. "I am rambling from place to place. In about a month I hope to be at Paris, and in the next month to be in England, and the next minute to see you." It must be confessed that this does not sound as if he were acting as steward for a noble lord, or as cicerone for any youthful member of the family.

Back in England by November, Gay needed money badly.

[69] Countess of Suffolk, *Letters*, I, 32.

Since the summer of 1718, especially during those quiet days at Stanton Harcourt, Gay had been fascinated by his reading in foreign pastorals, in the novels of Cervantes, and in the plays of Tasso and Guarini; and his enthusiasm for these stories was now to bear fruit in a new pastoral tragedy, *Dione*, which he had ready to take the boards following Hughes's *The Siege of Damascus* (February 17, 1720). The Lord Chamberlain's records show that Gay obtained an order to the managers, Wilks, Cibber, and Booth, to put the play on at that time.[70] For some unknown reason it was never acted,[71] and the general public knew nothing of its existence until it appeared in the quarto *Poems on Several Occasions* a few months later. The failure to get his play on the boards must have been a very real disappointment to Gay, for he had put much time and effort into the creation of this poetic drama, and doubtless hoped it would win for him a different sort of recognition from that already accorded. That he had his hesitations is clear from the prologue. The beaten paths of tragedy would have been safer, but these masque-like effects had a curious power over his imagination, and he made up his mind to seek strange adventures, even though in the process he might lose his way. Once again Gay was seeking novelty and on that altar sacrificed himself; for even regarded as a poem *Dione* is not great. Only the highest genius can transcend the artificiality of this form. By a sort of juggler's trick Gay had fooled the fates once this way, and created a beautiful poem in his *Shepherd's Week*, but when he attempted to treat the form seriously, the high heroics turned vapid for the most part, and we do grow tired, as Dr. Johnson says, of sheep and goats, and myrtle bowers and purling rivulets, through five acts. With Dr. Johnson's denunciations in mind, it is perhaps just as well to remember that pastoral verse has pleased far more than barbarians in the dawn of civilization—the courts of Augustus and Louis XIV for instance —and that change of taste in part accounts for Johnson's and for our own lack of interest. Gay had certainly read Lady Mary

[70] Nicoll, *A History of Early Eighteenth Century Drama 1700-1750*, p. 275.

[71] Neither Baker nor Genest mentions any production.

Wortley Montagu's matter-of-fact account of the actual Arcadians, and he may have thought his own shepherds had the same reality. She had written:

> The young lads generally divert themselves with making garlands for their favorite lambs, which I have often seen painted and adorned with flowers, lying at their feet, while they sung or played. It is not that they ever read romances. But these are the ancient amusements here, and as natural to them as cudgel-playing and football to our British swains; the softness and warmth of the climate forbidding all rough exercises, which were never so much as heard of amongst them, and naturally inspiring a laziness and aversion to labour, which the great plenty indulges.[72]

Gay was quite aware, as we have seen, of the pastoral crux, and deliberately, I think, sought to get Dresden-china effects in his play.[73] With careful production it might have pleased, but the verse is hardly good enough to carry it. Some features are novel. The moaning of enamored ghosts, sable Death, and purple daggers, ravens calling from the blasted oak, might have started a sympathetic shudder, since as yet in 1719 these machines had not been overused. The descriptive verse is often on a high level.

> See yon gay goldfinch hop from spray to spray,
> Who sings a farewell to the parting day;
> At large he flies o'er hill and dale and down;
> Is not each bush, each spreading tree his own?

The long flights of crows, high croaking from their food, the nibbling sheep clothing the hills like winter's snow, the silver axles of the moon rolling downward towards the chequered shadows, such phrases as these please with their simplicity, and the freshness they give to the image. Perhaps the best verses are to be found in the speech of Lycidas at the beginning of Act IV, as he looks down upon the sleeping maiden.

> May no rude wind the rustling branches move;
> Breathe soft, ye silent gales, nor wake my Love.

[72] Lady Mary Wortley Montagu to Pope, Adrianople, April 1, 1717 (Pope, *Works*, IX, 373).

[73] See Gay's preface to *The Shepherd's Week*.

Ye shepherds, piping homeward on the way,
Let not the distant ecchoes learn your lay;
Strain not, ye nightingales, your warbling throat,
May no loud shake prolong the shriller note,
Lest she awake; O sleep, secure her eyes,
That I may gaze; for if she wake, she flies.

There is some slight incongruity in allowing the satire on court-life and fashionable marriages to creep in, as Gay does, several times. Personifications adorn the verses on humble life; in fact, for us they ruin an otherwise pretty passage, though the later mid-century imitators of this feature did not think so.

Dione pleased neither Warton nor Dr. Johnson, and I imagine that it has been very infrequently read since the eighteenth century. It was printed in the collected editions of the *Poems* in 1720 and 1731, and was liked well enough to be issued separately in 1733 and in 1763.[74] The Germans apparently wanted to read it in their own language; at any rate, J. G. P. Müchler provided a translation about the middle of the eighteenth century.

V

Dione, then, not being acted, brought in none of the needed cash. All Gay's friends agreed that something must be done for him immediately. "Cabals were formed our Johnny's debts to clear," and since Gay had no other play ready for production, patronage must take an even more active form. Printing his collected *Poems* by subscription seemed a possible idea since the success of Prior, and that at least would distribute the burden. His friends nobly rallied in support of the scheme, and his list of subscribers rivals any of the famous successes of the time. Burlington and the Duke of Chandos headed the list with fifty copies each, Pulteney twenty-five, Bathurst, Warwick, Pelham, Craggs, all took ten, while down for more modest assignments we find Gay's early friend, the Earl of Essex, the Right Honorable John Hervey, Simon Harcourt, the Duke of Queens-

[74] *The Bee, Or Weekly Pamphlet* for Feb., 1733, contains a catalogue of books recently published, *Dione* among them. Allardyce Nicoll notices a Dublin issue of 1730 which I have not seen.

berry, Robert Walpole, Gay's sister, Mrs. Baller, many of the poets, Kneller and Handel and Heydegger, the two Miss Blounts, and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, to mention only a few of the names.

It would seem that the subscription list must have been well under way before Gay wrote *An Epistle to the Right Honourable Paul Methuen, Esq:* on the subject of patronage. This poem found a place for itself in the *Poems on Several Occasions* when the book finally appeared, but its compliments come so pat that it serves as a polite note of thanks for favors just received. Paul Methuen was made Comptroller of the Household early that year, and Gay may have hoped to draw his attention to his own needs at this appropriate moment. He speaks of the various ways for authors to be great. "Write rancorous libels," he says, "spatter a Minister with fulsome praise,"

> Launch out with freedom, flatter him enough;
> Fear not, all men are dedication-proof.

Compliments follow to Burlington and Chandos, to Pope and the wits.

> Were *Prior, Congreve, Swift,* and *Pope* unknown,
> Poor slander-selling *Curll* would be undone.

Only the obscure are free from malice, and on that hint Gay concocts a pleasant little fable of the crow and the lark, "To shoot at crows is powder flung away."

The task of choosing and preparing his poems for the press was no light one for Gay, and the quarto volume which Tonson and Lintot finally issued as a joint publication deserves notice from several points of view. Gay decided against reprinting the early poem, *Wine*, and the translations of Ovid. One gets the notion that he regarded the translation of these fragments as a pedestrian exercise, practice for better things; he never published his translations from Ariosto, which were probably thrown off that summer at Stanton Harcourt under the impetus of his Italian studies. More important than the missing poems are the ones which he had ready by this time to add to his col-

lected *Works*. All the major poems and epistles (whether published or unpublished so far) found a place. One minor epistle *To a young Lady with some Lampreys,* a graceful *jeu d'esprit* which modern taste may frown upon if it likes, now appeared for the first time. *The What d'ye Call It* is there, and *Dione,* as poetic drama. There were also the five town eclogues already commented on, only one of which, *The Toilette,* had been previously published, and some slighter poems which had earlier made their appearance in various *Miscellanies*. In addition, Gay had ready for publication now for the first time five tales in verse, one an imitation, as I suppose he thought, of Chaucer, called an *Answer to the Sompner's Prologue,* three others with a slightly medieval or horrific flavor, and one, *The Mad Dog,* a parable on the morals of modern society. In three of these, Gay was experimenting with a new medium that he was presently to use in *The Fables* with great success, the four-stress couplet. All these poems may be regarded as preliminary studies for the fables; they are brief stories, graphically told, to illustrate a moral which is made abundantly clear in the concluding lines. Gay was thus beginning at this time to discover one more thing that he could do with sureness of touch.

Four of Gay's songs appear in this volume, the charming and ever-popular *Sweet William's Farewell to Black-ey'd Susan,* followed by *The Lady's Lamentation, Damon and Cupid,* and *Daphnis and Chloe*. The first of these was set to music by four different musicians in the first year of its appearance, Carey, Leveridge, Haydon, and Sandoni. Two broadsides issued almost at once attest its popularity. Professor Nichol Smith offers the interesting suggestion that when writing the last stanza Gay may have remembered the scene when the Lady Theodosia, Clarendon's daughter, left the ship, as it shook loose the sails to carry him on his mission to Hanover back in 1714.

For *Sweet William's Farewell* was written at least a year or two before its publication in *Poems on Several Occasions*. The song and its tune were sufficiently well known to be parodied by the author of the ballad of "Blue-ey'd Lucy to the Tune of Black-ey'd Susan," which can be found in *Tunbridgalia: or,*

Tunbridge Miscellanies For the Year 1719. The parodies are innumerable in succeeding years; one of the most amusing of them describes the parting of Lord Castlereagh and Alderman Sir William Curtis, when the Walcheren expedition sailed, July 25, 1809.[75] The song found its way happily into many collections, and into many musical plays, surely not the latest of which was Douglas Jerrold's *Black-ey'd Susan; or, All in the Downs* (1829). Vincent Bourne translated it into Latin elegiacs in 1731, and George Denman into Greek iambics, the final stamp of approval, in 1898. Even Samuel Wesley, the younger, was moved by the song to write *An Epistle from Mr. Pope to Mr. Gay occasioned by two Stanzas in Black-ey'd Susan.*[76]

Damon and Cupid was written as a compliment to Bellenden and Lepel, Gay's friends among the maids of honor, and never attained wide popularity. *Daphnis and Chloe,* on the other hand, though we have forgotten it, was loved by our forebears. There are two single-sheet folios of this song, with music, in the British Museum, one apparently printed in 1720, and one five years later. Both *Daphnis and Chloe* and *Sweet William's Farewell* find a place in Watts's *Musical Miscellany* (1729-1731) and in many similar collections too numerous to mention.[77]

Last among the new pieces in this volume is the epigram, *My Own Epitaph,* which is always associated with Gay's name, and, since he repeated it in a letter to Pope in 1729 when discouraged by illness, is usually thought of as his considered view of life when he was on the point of leaving it.

> Life's a jest; and all things show it.
> I thought so once; but now I know it.

This epitaph is a curiously puzzling personal document. It might have been written in a mood of the highest hilarity, or in one of the deepest dejection. It probably reflects neither mood, but arose from Gay's exasperated feeling of the inconsequence of his own life, the surprising contradictions, the re-

[75] *The Good-Fellow's Calendar, and Almanack of Perpetual Jocularity* (1826), p. 192.

[76] *Miscellanea* (1727), I, 136.

[77] Watts, *Musical Miscellany* (1729-1731).

wards that came unsought and the earnest efforts that passed quite unnoticed.

This time with the publication of his collected poems his plans and high hopes did not end—at least for the moment—in exasperation. One thousand pounds or more found their way into his hands from subscribers and sales, and for a few months Gay must have been a happy man. Unfortunately, his friend, James Craggs the younger, gave him some South Sea stock shortly after, and, stimulated by this gift, Gay plunged all his little fortune in this vain venture. That meant ecstasies for the moment and despairs very soon, but in the meantime the poet was enjoying his success with his friends, turning off one important occasional piece, and writing songs. Pope's ship had at last come home; the final two volumes of the *Iliad* were issued on May 12, 1720.[78] Gay proceeded to welcome him back to normal existence in a poem he called *Mr. Pope's Welcome from Greece.* This poem has considerable biographical interest, as it gives a charming picture of the friendships of the two men at that time, and traces miniatures of character in phrases continually repeated by historians of the period from that day to this—though the last remark should be qualified, since after all the poem remained in manuscript until Stevens's *Additions to the Works of Alexander Pope, Esq.* appeared in 1776. One wonders why Gay never printed the poem himself. Presumably he felt that it would be of interest only to his friends, and modestly underestimated the poetic quality of these felicitous verses.

> Long hast thou, friend! been absent from thy soil,
> Like patient *Ithacus* at siege of *Troy;*
> I have been witness of thy six years toil,
> Thy daily labours, and thy night's annoy,
> Lost to thy native land, with great turmoil,
> On the wide sea, oft threat'ning to destroy:
> Methinks with thee I've trod *Sigaean* ground,
> And heard the shores of *Hellespont* resound.
>
> Did I not see thee when thou first sett'st sail
> To seek adventures fair in *Homer's* land?

[78] Pope, *Works,* VI, 273 n.

Did I not see thy sinking spirits fail,
And wish thy bark had never left the strand?
Ev'n in mid ocean often didst thou quail,
And oft lift up thy holy eye and hand,
Praying the Virgin dear, and saintly choir,
Back to the port to bring thy bark entire.

The ship comes in by Gravesend, Tilbury, Greenwich, Deptford, to its dock amid the crowds of welcoming friends. Gay manages to make the poem far more than a catalogue of names. One can imagine no more varied throng, and Gay drags in no name for the sake of rhyme. Their conjunction here is the highest compliment that could be paid to the character of Pope. Gay must have written the poem between April and November of this year, probably early in that period. It reflects once again the influence of Gay's Italian reading. Sir Anthony Panizzi pointed out many years ago that Gay was here imitating some stanzas of Ariosto at the beginning of Canto XLVI of *Orlando Furioso*.[79]

[79] *Orlando inamorato di Bojardo: Orlando Furioso di Ariosto: with an essay on the romantic narrative poetry of the Italians; memoirs, and notes* by Antonio Panizzi (1830-34), IX, 311.

CHAPTER V

SOUTH SEA AND DEPRESSION (1720-1726)

I

THE SUMMER of 1720 was a cheerful one, in spite of South Sea squalls. Gay and Pope went about among their friends, both feeling the exhilaration of an important task completed. On June 16, Matthew Prior wrote to Harley from Westminster:

> According to your order I direct to you at Bath . . . I have nothing to add but that I am going to dine with John of Bucks at a sort of *convivium poeticum*, for Pope and Gay are the other two guests. I have Gay's works and Milton's as well for Lady Harriette as yourself, and in my consummate prudence I have judged it better to keep these books together with Gyles Jacob till I see you, than to send them rambling round the country after you. I invited the *virtuosi* t'other day, Gibbs, Wanley, Wooten, and Christian; the two first could not come, and the two last could not be got away till midnight; dirty Dibben of Dorsetshire, and the Archdeacon of Bath were of the company, as well to bless the meat as to drink great share of the claret; Morley assisted in tea. It was a conversation about five o'clock, a disputation towards seven, and a bear-garden about ten. We drank your healths over and over, as well in our civil as bacchanalian hours.[1]

Wanley, Lord Harley's librarian, had joined the crowd that welcomed Pope in Gay's poem, but he would not go to Matt Prior's party.

> O *Wanley*, whence com'st thou with shorten'd hair,
> And visage from thy shelves with dust besprent?
> "Forsooth (quoth he) from placing *Homer* there,
> "For ancients to compyle is myne entente:
> "Of ancients only hath Lord *Harley care*.

[1] Historical Manuscripts Commission, *MSS of the Marquis of Bath* (1904), III, 482.

In August, Gay was at Canons, the Duke of Chandos's place, doing his bit in the production of Handel's oratorio, *Queen Esther*. The most celebrated songs from this piece were published, along with the score of Handel's overture, in 1736, four years after Gay's death. It was Handel's first English oratorio and was produced at Canons on August 29, 1720.[2] The songs have been attributed to Samuel Humphreys, Pope, Gay, and Arbuthnot, and it is now impossible to distinguish the work of each.

One other song belongs to this period, *The Despairing Shepherd*. Very popular in its day, it was printed twice in folio in Gay's time with different musical settings. It also found a place in Watts's *Musical Miscellany* and in Allan Ramsay's *Tea Table Miscellany*.

Gay's thoughts were very soon on other matters. As early as June 24, Pope wrote to Fortescue: "Pray, if it is possible to remember a mere word of course in such a place as Exchange-alley, remember me there to Gay; for anywhere else (I deem) you will not see him as yet."[3]

At this time Pope was annoyed by all the stock-market fever, and felt that it put a stop to all genuine trade and all friendship, all honor even, but he himself caught the infection soon along with Gay, and presently we find the two of them planning to invest some of their surplus gains from South Sea in a Devonshire estate and to become effectually the countrymen of Fortescue. The plan was never carried out. Warnings attended too late came from conscientious men demonstrating the fallaciousness of the South Sea scheme. One of them wrote:

> The *South-Sea* Stock is risen to so monstrous an Excess, that it puts an Affront upon all Sense and Reason; a Set of crafty Men having undertaken to delude the World with an Opinion, that they can, by a little *hocus pocus* Management, make a single Unit become a good Ten.[4]

[2] *The Daily Journal*, April 17, 1732, advertises *Esther* to be performed at Villars-Street on Thursday the twentieth. On April 19, the advertisement is repeated with "The Words by Mr. Pope" added.

[3] Pope, *Works*, IX, 98.

[4] *A Letter to a Conscientious Man: Concerning the Use and the Abuse of Riches* (1720), p. 14.

Walpole himself was among the fearful and predicted collapse.[5] No one paid any attention to such old-fogy advice; no one ever does.

In London stands a famous pile,
and near that pile an alley,
Where merry crowds for riches toil,
and wisdom stoops to folly;
Here sad and joyful high and low,
court Fortune for her Graces,
And as she smiles or frowns they show
their Gestures and Grimaces . . .
Our greatest Ladies hither come,
and ply in chariots daily,
Oft pawn their jewels for a sum
to venture't in the alley.[6]

Only a few weeks after Pope wrote to Fortescue about the Devonshire estate, that is, towards the end of August, the stock began to fall, and by the first of October the collapse was complete. No one could any longer be deceived.

'Tis impossible to express the vast Alterations are made here, by the sudden and unaccountable Fall of the South-Sea, as well as other Stocks; some few, indeed, of the Dealers in them, had happily secured themselves before the storm arose, but the far greater Number who are involved in this public Calamity appear with such dejected Looks, that a man of little Skill in the Art of Physiognomy, may easily distinguish them. Exchange-Alley sounds no longer of Thousands got in an Instant; but on the contrary all Corners of the Town are filled with the Groans of the Afflicted; and they who lately rode in great State to that famous Mart of Money, now humbly condescend to walk the Streets on Foot, and instead of adding to their Equipages, have, at once, lost their Estates; and even those of the trading Rank talked loudly of retiring into the Country, purchasing Estates there, building fine Houses, and in everything imitating their Betters, are now become Bankrupts, and have, by Necessity, shut up their Shops, because they could not keep them open any longer; however, for the

[5] *Diary of Mary Countess Cowper, Lady of the Bedchamber to the Princess of Wales, 1714-1720*, p. 134.

[6] "A South-Sea Ballad: or, Merry Remarks upon Exchange-Alley Bubbles," Song II in *The Shepherd's Garland: Compos'd of Four New Songs.*

Comfort of such whose Conditions will admit of a Remedy, 'tis said a certain Gentleman has formed a Scheme for the Relief of those concerned. In the meantime, for their present Consolation, we advise them to consult Seneca upon Losses, who, perhaps, may be as useful to them as to the Gentleman in the play called The Gamester, on the like Occasion.[7]

Pope had sold out at least part of his stock on the advice of Caryll, but Gay was caught very short indeed, and even the clean shirt and shoulder of mutton every day, which Fenton had been so anxious for him to reserve, vanished with the rest. At least most of the biographers, following Dr. Johnson's lead, have been content to register complete loss and Gay's collapse under disappointment with the usual sheltering friends about him. Now Gay was neither fool nor lap dog; he may have been "negligent and a bad manager," as Pope later calls him,[8] but he was as canny about money matters as most of his friends that year. Anyway, South Sea, which had rocketed well up to 1,000, had fallen by the end of the year to 125 or 130. Gay was, we know, harassed by Tonson's claims in October. He had failed to meet his note with that publisher due in September, but his letter certainly does not adopt the tone of a broken man by any means.[9] Some small part of his fortune may have been left, for on February 24 of the following year Gay was writing an order on Charles Lockyer to pay Thomas Glegg dividends on his South Sea stock, and on May 1, 1721, he transferred some of his stock to Pope's account for some reason which I cannot discover,[10] nor can I find out how much was left. As

[7] *The Weekly Journal, or Saturday's Post,* Oct. 1, 1720.

[8] Spence, *Anecdotes,* p. 214.

[9] Printed by Underhill in his edition of Gay's *Poems,* p. xlii.

[10] Both these business letters were originally in a collection of letters made by William Upcott of the London Institution. The first is now in the Huntington Library, the second in the Bodleian (MS *Montagu.* d. 1). Perhaps I should quote the second.

May 1, 1721

Sr.

Please to place to the Account of Alexander Pope Esqr all such Stock as is due to me for one thousand pounds of the third Subscription paid in upon my Name for sale of South Sea Stock.

J. Gay.

As late as June 25, 1722, Gay ordered the South Sea Company to pay the dividends

for the breakdown in health and cheerfulness, Gay was well enough, as we shall see, to be doing revising jobs about the theatres that winter and spring, and even when he was driven by the return of his colical complaint to drink the waters in Bath about August 1, 1721, his melancholy arose from his own serious illness and from the death of his friend, the young Lord Warwick,[11] rather than from his financial disasters. Finally, does the *Panegyrical Epistle to Mr. Thomas Snow, Goldsmith near Temple-Bar*, which Gay wrote to commemorate the bursting of the Bubble, sound like the ravings of a man distraught, unable to distinguish the real world from the fantastic imaginings of Bedlam? The world, he thought, had been Bedlam for a time and fools had gaped for golden showers.

> No wonder, if we found some *Poets* there,
> Who live on Fancy, and can feed on Air;
> No wonder, *they* were caught by *South-Sea* Schemes,
> Who ne'er enjoy'd a Guinea, but in Dreams;
> No wonder, *they* their Third Subscriptions sold,
> For Millions of imaginary Gold:
> No wonder, that *their* Fancies wild can frame
> Strange Reasons, that a Thing is still the same,
> Though chang'd throughout in Substance and in Name.
> But *you* (whose Judgment scorns Poetick Flights)
> With Contracts furnish Boys for Paper Kites.[12]

Gay looked at his stock-certificates, saw them fit for little more than making kites, and like a sensible man tried to forget them.

II

If we may believe Leonard Welsted's *Prologue to the Town, As it was Spoken at the Theatre in Little Lincoln's-Inn-Fields* (1721), the people were that winter at last forgetting the frenzy of the stock market and finding their way back to more normal pleasures.

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on his stock due the preceding Christmas to Henry Watson. See his letter preserved in the manuscript collections of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

[11] *Letter-Books of John Hervey, first Earl of Bristol . . . 1651 to 1750* (Wells, 1894), II, 161.

[12] Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes*, VIII, 170. Two editions of this poem were published in 1721. There was no further printing until the *Miscellanies in Verse* (1727).

At length, the Phrenzy of the Realm is o'er,
And the wide-spreading Mischief reigns no more:
Lured by false Prospects, and misguided long,
At last to Balls and Theatres you throng.[13]

Gay turned also to the theatre. We find him writing a pretty epigram by way of motto for Rolli's opera, *Mutius Scaevola.*

Who here blames words, or verses, songs, or singers,
Like *Mutius Scaevola* will burn his fingers.

A more important task was his revision of Thomas Wright's old play, *The Female Virtuosos,* or as it was now called, *No Fools like Wits.* Mottley's *Complete List of all the English Dramatic Poets* (1747) gives under Gay:

1720. *No Fools like Wits:* A Comedy, acted at the Theatre in *Lincolns-Inn-Fields,* in the Year 1720. It is an Alteration of a Comedy called the *Female Virtuosoes;* and acted against Mr. *Cibber's Refusal,* which was partly taken from the same Play.

The *Biographia Dramatica,*[14] however, says that this play was merely a republication of Wright's *Female Virtuosos,* by Gay, and that it was set up and acted three nights, in opposition to Cibber's *Refusal,* "which was partly borrowed from the same play, or at least from the same original, viz. the *Femmes Sçavantes* of Molière. No one, we believe, will think this comedy equal in merit to *The Refusal.*" This statement cannot be entirely correct. Gay would scarcely have lent the support of his name to a mere reacting of the old play under a new name, even though the managers paid him well in an effort to fill their house. As it happens, Curll sought to turn a penny in this little theatrical war and printed Wright's play verbatim as it had appeared in 1693, even to the dedication to Charles, Earl of Winchelsea, signed by Wright, and the names of the original cast. All he adds is a list of characters, "Thus Cibberiz'd," changing the names of the actors naturally, and reducing the list from thirteen to ten, and a preface addressed to

[13] These lines were written for a special performance of *Measure for Measure,* which did not take place.

[14] (1812), III, 86.

Colley Cibber himself. In this he reminds Cibber quite unnecessarily of the history of this adaptation of Molière on the English stage.

It has been likewise this Season revived at *Lincolns-Inn-Fields*, under the Title of, *No Fools like Wits;* nor indeed did Nature ever produce a more egregious Coxcomb than the Reviver; who to honour *Molière*, has blended the *Miser* and the *Generous Man* [Chrisalus in *Les Femmes Sçavantes*] to form a new Character, but such a one as can only be called *Monstrum* & *Horrendum.*

Curll was not pleased with Gay's adaptation. Considering the strained relations that existed between him and Pope, we should scarcely expect him to be. His sneering criticism, however, makes it clear that Gay actually rewrote the play and changed at least one of the characters. Curll liked neither Gay nor Cibber. His remark about a new character that Cibber had introduced is perhaps worth adding. It follows directly the quotation above.

You have indeed done *Molière* a Piece of much more exemplary Justice; for when I came to the *Theatre* with my Head crammed full of agreeable Ideas, I found you had taken all his Characters; tho', by the bye, your bringing *a South-Sea Director* into an honest Family, is like grafting a *Crab* upon a *Pippin.* After having paid for your *Refusal*, heard *your Ladies Philosophy*, and considered of *your Stock;* upon being asked by a Friend, What the Entertainment was like? it is like, says I, (knowing your Modesty) a *Sampler*, whereon *Monsieur Molière's* STITCHING may easily be perceived from Mr. *Cibber's* CANVASS. Then recollecting a lucky Simile of our old Friend Mr. *Cleaveland*, I declared of your whole Performance, that

> There's no Imagination that can strike it,
> 'Tis so *like* NOTHING, that there's NOTHING *like it.*

Gay's play was, so far as I know, never printed. Either his play or Cibber's must have excited public curiosity, as Curll's reprint with the above preface, first issued on January 14, 1721, apparently ran into a second edition by February 15.[15] It may

[15] See Ralph Straus, *The Unspeakable Curll* (1927), p. 265. Mr. Straus gives only one issue, under date Jan. 14, 1721, which he presumably got from an advertisement (though he quotes the British Museum copy, 2d ed., Feb. 15, as being the one he

be that Gay's friends thought they were getting his play, and Cibber's friends thought they were getting his. In that case, both factions were fooled; they got Wright's old play and Curll's brief opinions. More probably, with Grub Street in a somewhat touchy condition, the title alone sold the pamphlet, not for the first time in Curll's establishment. Curll still had a few of them left in 1728, for he advertised them for sale in the back of the *Poetical Works* of William Pattison.

III

Most of the time that spring (1721) Gay was with Lord Burlington at Chiswick. His friendship with the Pulteneys had not cooled, and he visited them frequently. At their home he had grown intimate with Francis Colman, Mrs. Pulteney's nephew, and the father later of George Colman, Garrick's friend. Colman had been appointed British resident in Florence, and proposed to travel to Dover by way of Chevening, the Pulteneys' country home. Pulteney wrote to assure him of welcome:

> I am glad to hear you will make Chevening your way to Dover, but you may depend upon it that we will force you to stay one night at least. Mr. Williams shall be extremely welcome, and I shall be proud of beginning an acquaintance with him. Your coach will be filled with your own family, if you could persuade John Gay to come on horseback with you I shall be glad of it, because the affair is over which was to have brought me to Town, so that he cannot return with me.[16]

The only letter we have of Gay's for the year 1721 was sent to Colman after the latter's departure for Florence. Gay wrote from Bath, August 23, to tell his friend of his arrival there with Lord Burlington three weeks earlier, and their intention to go into Yorkshire before long. His "colical humour" had

saw). Curll may merely have printed a new title (2d ed.) for the first edition sheets which were still unsold. The copy of this book in the British Museum originally belonged to Gay himself.

[16] *Posthumous Letters from various Celebrated Men; addressed to Francis Colman, and George Colman, the Elder* (1820), p. 1.

been once again troubling him, and he appeared to be depressed partly by illness, partly by Lord Warwick's death, and partly because there seemed to be not the least prospect of independence ahead. He complained of the lack of company; the Pulteneys had had some thoughts of Bath when he had seen them some weeks before in Chiswick, but they had not arrived.[17]

Indeed, the Countess of Bristol and Mrs. Bradshaw (Mrs. Howard's friend) seem to have helped him pass the time more successfully than anyone else, until the arrival of the Duchess of Queensberry. A fellow-lodger wrote to her friend that she had met him: "Gay the poet lodges in our house so he has supt with us."[18] The Countess of Bristol—Molly Lepel's new mother-in-law—wrote somewhat more illuminating comment in a letter to her husband a few days before Gay sent off his gloomy epistle to Colman:

> The plays begin tonight, & I sopose all deversions will go forward now Governor Nash is arrived. Poor Gaye is exceeding maloncholy for the death of his frind, Lord Warwick, who dyd (as they say) without a will; so all goes to Lady Betty, his aunt, who marred a country attorney, & poor Rich, of our famelly, is an earl without a groat.[19]

The only other information we have of Gay's visit to Bath that season is contained in two letters of Mrs. Bradshaw to Mrs. Howard. Mrs. Howard must have been lonely that summer, for Mary Bellenden and Molly Lepel had both married the preceding year and were no longer at Court. After drinking the waters for a month, Gay was still very miserable; Mrs. Bradshaw reports his sad state in her first letter (August 30):

> I would fain persuade Mr. Gay to draw his pen; but he is a lost thing, and the colic has reduced him to pass a hum-drum hour with me very often. I desired him to club a little wit towards diverting you, but he said it was not in him; so I chose rather to expose myself,

[17] *Ibid.*, pp. 7-9.

[18] *Political and Social Letters of a Lady of the Eighteenth Century, 1721-1771*, ed. Emily F. D. Osborn (1890), p. 22. Letter to Robert Byng, dated Bath, Aug. 30, 1721.

[19] *Letter-Books of John Hervey, first Earl of Bristol . . . 1651 to 1750* (Wells, 1894), II, 161.

than not put you in mind of a poor sick body that has taken physic today and not seen the face of a mortal.[20]

Gay was in the habit, we learn, of writing to Mrs. Howard at this time, but no letters of that year survive. By September 19 he was better. Mrs. Bradshaw saw him only occasionally for a private conference at the Pump, but most of the time he was with the Duchess of Queensberry. Dr. Cheyne was about also, "Big blustering Cheyne," as one of the current lampoons called him, and doubtless gave Gay lots of good advice about exercise and diet.

> In vain he toils to teach unruly Man
> T'enjoy firm health thro' life's determin'd Span:
> And shew them how to guard themselves from Ills,
> By wholesome Exercise and sober Meals.[21]

The Marlboroughs, who had been in Bath at the time of Gay's last visit in 1716, were not there this time, for reasons possibly that the Duchess had once suggested in a letter to Lady Cowper.

I have been upon the Walks but twice, and I never saw any Place Abroad that had more Stinks and Dirt in it than *Bath;* with this Difference only, that we are not starved, for here is great Plenty of Meat, and very good, and as to the Noise, that keeps One almost always awake. I can bear it with Patience, and all other Misfortunes, as long as I think the Waters do the Duke of *Marlborough* any good.[22]

When Gay left Bath, and when or whether he visited Yorkshire with Burlington, are unknown. Certainly the most important development of the visit to Bath that year was the growing intimacy with the Duchess of Queensberry. Her husband had been a subscriber to Gay's *Poems on Several Occa-*

[20] Countess of Suffolk, *Letters,* I, 74.

[21] *The Diseases of Bath. A Satire* (1737), p. 7.

[22] *Diary of Mary Countess Cowper, Lady of the Bedchamber to the Princess of Wales, 1714-1720,* pp. 196-197. Extracts of a letter from the Duchess of Marlborough to Lady Cowper, Bath, Sept. 3, 1716.

For a careful matter-of-fact description of Bath, see "A Tour through Several Parts of England," by Samuel Gale, Esq., F. S. A., written in 1705, revised in 1730, and published by John Nichols in *Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica,* Vol. III, "Reliquae Galeanae," No. II, part 1, pp. 21 ff.

sions the year of his marriage to Catharine Hyde, and this unspoiled triangle of friendship was by this time becoming one of the great joys of the poet's life.

IV

As the year drew to its close, Pope was just beginning to organize another project that would involve Gay and Fenton before the task was done. *The Weekly Journal or Saturday's Post* for November 18, 1721, has the following note: "The celebrated Mr. Pope is preparing a correct Edition of Shakespear's Works; that of the late Mr. Rowe being very faulty."

Probably Gay had little hard work to do on this task until the following spring, when he and a group of Pope's friends developed the habit of getting together to collate the several printings of Shakespeare's plays.[23] Mr. Sherburn has recently published a letter from Pope to Tonson which refers to these meetings:

. . . my affairs have hurryd me to & from London, interchangeably every day; the last part of the Planting Season taking me up here, & business which I think less agreeable, there. I'm resolvd to pass the next whole week in London, purposely to get together Parties of my acquaintance ev'ry night, to collate the several Editions of Shakespear's single Plays—5 of which I have ingaged to this design.[24]

They were still busy together on August 12, before Gay went off to Bath.[25] This work would at least provide Gay with funds, though not too liberally, as the total he seems to have received from Tonson was £35 17*s.* 6*d.*, almost the same amount, incidentally, that Rowe received for the entire task.[26]

The work on Shakespeare must have been distinctly less

[23] One friend who would not be there was Prior. See *Mist's Weekly Journal*, Sept. 23, 1721. "Last Friday 7 Night died at the Lord Harley's in Northamptonshire, Matthew Prior, Esq; Resident at the Court of France in the latter end of the Reign of Queen Anne, and celebrated for his Poetical Writings. The following Epitaph is said to have been writ by him, some Years ago.

Courtiers and Heralds, by your Leave,
Here lies the Bones of *Matthew Prior;*
The Son of Adam and Eve;
Let *Bourbon* or *Nassaw* go higher."

[24] Sherburn, *The Early Career of Alexander Pope*, p. 308.

[25] Pope, *Works*, VIII, 57.

[26] Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes*, V, 597.

agreeable to Pope than the planting tasks mentioned in the letter above. He speaks in a letter to Caryll,[27] of the "due gradation of dulness, from a poet, a translator, and from a translator, a mere editor," and Gay had the notion that both the *Shakespeare* and the *Odyssey* were potboilers to cover those losses in South Sea that Pope preferred not to talk much about.[28] The planting, however, had all his enthusiasm, and when the house and garden were finally in order, Gay wrote him a congratulatory letter—or it may be poem—on the event, a letter which has since disappeared. The grotto had been too much for Pope, and when he comes to acknowledge Gay's letter he loses himself in romantic vaporings about Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. His sentimental heart is breaking. No wonder Lady Mary preferred to stifle those verses.

> I see sometimes Mr. Congreve, and very seldom Mr. Pope, who continues to embellish his house at Twickenham. He has made a subterranean grotto, which he has furnished with looking-glass, and they tell me it has a very good effect. I here send you some verses addressed to Mr. Gay, who wrote him a congratulatory letter on the finishing his house. I stifled them here, and I beg they may die the same death at Paris, and never go further than your closet.[29]

About a month after this pretty exchange of prosaic and poetic felicities, the great Duke of Marlborough died (June 16, 1722). Gay's relations with that family had not before this time been intimate. He had met "the Viceroy Sarah" and Marlborough in Bath in 1716, Sarah somewhat subdued no doubt by her husband's pitiful breakdown, and still more by failure of the newcomers from Hanover to appreciate the family loyalty. Elsewhere he had met the daughter Henrietta, Congreve's friend, now Duchess of Marlborough. It was only polite that he should address some verses on the death of the Duke to her. On July 11, the poem appeared in folio, as *An Epistle to Her Grace Henrietta Dutchess of Marlborough.* It has unfortunately no merit beyond the smoothness of its verse,

[27] Pope, *Works*, VI, 281. [28] Swift, *Letters*, III, 154.
[29] *Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, I, 461.

and remains the only example of Gay's lapse into the flabby panegyrical fashion of the day. Some golden guineas may have found their way to his pocket in payment for the flattery, and no doubt the young Duchess would welcome him with smiles when he met her at Bath the next month. Let us hope that she did not notice one lapse from good taste which Gay permitted himself in the poem.

Gay went to Bath in August and remained for nearly eleven weeks in the hope of getting some relief from his old complaint. The company was better than in the preceding year. In addition to Congreve and his Duchess, Gay found Swift's old friend, Duke Disney (who spread a report that Swift would presently appear in Bath), the two doctor-friends, Arbuthnot and Cheyne, and the Pulteneys, with whom Gay may have made the journey. What chance Gay would have in a crowd like this to get the rest and proper care necessary in his somewhat debilitated state we can only guess. Pope certainly thought Arbuthnot's example none too good in the matter of high living. "Now I speak of those regions about the abdomen, pray dear Gay, consult with him and Dr. Cheyne, to what exact pitch your belly may be suffered to swell, not to outgrow theirs, who are, yet, your betters."[30]

Arbuthnot stayed not so long as Gay, only three or four weeks; long enough, however, to drop some hints about that astonishing document, *Annus Mirabilis,* announcing a grand metamorphosis of the sexes as a part of the wonders to take place on the famous conjunction of Jupiter, Mars, and Saturn, December 29, 1722. Pope and he had in all probability been concocting this poem before Arbuthnot left London, and showing it about to friends also, since Pope complains about Arbuthnot's leaving his bastards at other folk's doors. Here was another idea, and Gay sat down to write his own special modification of it, *An Epistle to the most Learned Doctor W—d—d; from a Prude, That was unfortunately metamorphos'd on Saturday, December 29, 1722.* At least this is the most natural inference

[30] Pope, *Works,* VII, 423.

to draw from what evidence we have about the authorship of the naughty poem. It takes its lead directly from *Annus Mirabilis.*

> Alas! too late I to my Sorrow find
> That these Astrologers ar'n't always blind;
> What Depths they search? What Mysteries unfold?
> *Annus Mirabilis*—this Change foretold:
> I read it thrice—and cry'd—there's nothing in't,
> *Grubstreet* all o'er—the Paper—Stile—and Print.

The author then makes the sensationalism of the idea still more pointed by restricting it to one particular metamorphosis, and allowing the prude—so disastered—to call in the now notorious Dr. Woodward to her aid. The story of the terrible night at the Opera is, I fear, amusingly told, but worse is to come.

> Thus when an Earthquake shakes the trembling Ground,
> First, from below, strange bellowing Noises sound;
> Inward Convulsions torture Mother Earth,
> She seems prepar'd to give some Monster Birth;
> All Nature's sick—but whilst she lab'ring heaves,
> A gaping hideous Chasm her Bosom cleaves;
> Some Mountain she thrusts forth, to ease her Pain,
> Which sprouts at once, and tow'rs it o'er the Plain.

This passage is in direct ridicule of Woodward's notions, more cleverly put than the scorn for his collections of fish, butterflies, and animals amphibious, which one finds in the opening paragraph of the poem. It hardly seems to me that the satire in either of these passages is particularly esoteric; surely these notions were the commonplaces of laughing comment in the coffeehouses long before 1722, and Arbuthnot's scientific acquirements are not needed to explain their appearance here. The general idea was Arbuthnot's or Pope's, as we decide on the authorship of *Annus Mirabilis;* if Arbuthnot helped much with this other poem he helped point the wit, not draft the satire. In technical facility the verse itself is quite beyond him.[31]

[31] See also Lester Beattie, *John Arbuthnot,* pp. 238-241.

V

When Gay got back to London again and settled in for the winter, he was moved to write for the first time in many a long year to his old friend Swift, and from December 22, 1722, till Gay's death ten years later the two kept in close touch with each other. The immediate occasion for Gay's letter was a conversation he had had with Berkeley, who had just come from Ireland. Gay writes with affectionate warmth about his disappointment at not seeing Swift at Bath, tells Swift about his present circumstances, his lodging in Burlington House, the ineffectual favors of the great, and his hopes for more substantial preferment.

Gay's hopes must have fluctuated during that year with more than usual vivacity. Pulteney's friends had formed a government once again in 1721, and much might now be expected. Walpole had ridden into power on the South Sea whirlwinds, and might reasonably have remembered Pulteney's earlier loyalty. He did not, however, and Pulteney had to wait until the spring of 1723 for even the minor post of cofferer to the household. Probably through Burlington's influence rather than his, Gay was given a commissionership of state lotteries,[32] a place yielding £150 a year which he managed to keep until 1731, in spite of Walpole's later quite natural irritations over *The Beggar's Opera* and *Polly*. At the same time that Gay obtained the commissionership, the Earl of Lincoln found lodgings for him at Whitehall. Apparently, a month or so later he was expecting also some preferment in Pulteney's department, but this favor was not granted. At last Gay had a steady income, small but not despicable, and rooms that he might call his without worrying about the rent. The man with "too much honesty or too little sublunary wisdom," to use Swift's diagnosis of Gay's political character, had not been entirely neglected. The duties of the office were not excessive; Gay still had time for work on Shakespeare, for dinner parties at Arbuthnot's with Lord Bathurst and Lewis, for opera, and for some ambitious literary schemes of his own.

[32] Swift, *Letters*, III, 155.

These schemes were interrupted for two months in the summer (July and August) by an expedition to Tunbridge Wells in the Burlington entourage. This journey, if we may judge from the letters Gay wrote to Mrs. Howard at the time, was undertaken more for fun than for physic, and the fun seems to have been sufficiently hilarious. Pope correctly guessed his chief relaxation. He wrote on July 13, 1723: "In the meantime we wish you success as a fisher of women at the Wells, a rejoicer of the comfortless and widow, an impregnator of the barren, and a play-fellow of the maiden."[33] For letter-writing purposes at any rate the lady who had most of his attentions was an extraordinarily stout young damsel with an inordinate fondness for ale. He called her his "wheat-ear" and admired her frankness in the exhibition of a ruling passion. Mrs. Howard disapproved both of the fat lady and of Gay's fondness for sincerity, which, as a lady grown old in courts, she regarded as a quality of character most unthriving.

> I am resolved you shall open a new scene of behaviour next winter, and begin to pay in coin your debts of fair promises. I have some thoughts of giving you a few loose hints for a satire; and if you manage it right, and not indulge that foolish good-nature of yours, I do not question but I shall see you in good employment before christmas.[34]

That suggestion of Mrs. Howard's must have sunk well down in Gay's mind, for his reply shows that he had thought it over carefully, and would, when the time came, need not much help from Mrs. Howard. "I cannot indeed wonder that the talents requisite for a great statesman are so scarce in the world, since so many of those who possess them are every month cut off in the prime of their age at the Old Bailey."

It would appear that Swift's suggestions of a Newgate pastoral, and Mrs. Howard's notion of a satire on the politicians had already got associated in Gay's mind to lie fallow for a few years more.

[33] Pope, *Works*, VII, 426.

[34] Countess of Suffolk, *Letters*, I, 111.

VI

At the moment Gay did not propose to busy himself with anything like that, but was before long writing a poetic tragedy of a conventional sort, such as had been bringing in quite satisfactory cash receipts to Young, Fenton, and even to less capable dramatists.

The Captives, as he called it, has the usual noble-minded hero, sentimental tyrant, and love-maddened princess. We are moving once again in the realms of *Aurengzebe;* only there is more of love and less of war. The flimsiest plot imaginable leads us finally to a happy conclusion, with the good rewarded and the evil punished. Yet most of us would insist on shifting the categories in the fashion of Blake's *Proverbs of Hell*, that is, if we got sufficiently interested in the reading to want to do anything at all about it. The verse is a bastard blank variety with uncontrolled redundancies, not to be distinguished from high-flown, stilted prose, except when the printed page is before one. It seems odd that Gay, who was so sensitive to bombast in other writers, should willingly have set himself to provide material for the next *What d'ye Call It.* That of course was *Tom Thumb,* and Fielding readily found a place for *The Captives* in his satire. One should not forget that the plays which are set up for ridicule in satiric comedies of *The Rehearsal* type are almost certain to be the very ones that have met with most general approval. There is of course no point in satirizing a play that no one has seen. *Cato, The Distressed Mother,* and *Venice Preserved* appeared in *The What d'ye Call It,* and if Fielding thought *The Captives* worthy of a place in his play, that fact is additional evidence that the public liked it.

Mrs. Howard had been as good as her word, and by tactful suggestions now and then had stimulated interest in the new play, until Caroline not only agreed to patronize *The Captives* but wished to hear it read before production. Gay was called in and read the play himself. Something absurd must have happened on this occasion, probably nothing more than the accidental overturning of a screen and the consequent embarrass-

ment, but Benjamin Victor got hold of the basic facts and elaborated them into the amusing story that has been repeated through the years and does not appear in the least characteristic of the central figure involved.

Mr. Gay had interest enough with the late Queen *Caroline*, then Princess of *Wales*, to excite Her Royal Highness's Curiosity to hear the Author read his Play to her at *Leicester*-House. The Day was fixed, and Mr. *Gay* was commanded to attend. He waited some Time in a Presence-Chamber with his Play in his Hand; but being a very modest Man, and unequal to the Trial he was going to, when the Door of the Drawing-Room, where the Princess sat with her Ladies, was opened for his Entrance, he was so much confus'd, and concern'd about making his proper Obeysance, that he did not see a low Footstool that happened to be near him, and stumbling over it, he fell against a large Screen, which he overset, and threw the Ladies into no small Disorder. Her Royal Highness's great Goodness soon reconciled this whimsical Accident, but the unlucky Author was not so soon clear of his Confusion.[35]

No. 52 of *The Adventurer* (May 5, 1753) contains this story dressed up by Hawkesworth as "The distresses of an author invited to read his play." There is no need to question Gay's tendency to underestimate his own ability; all his friends are agreed on that. Pope noticed it in the early days of their friendship, and one of Buckingham's poems, which Pope was busy publishing this very year, confirms the impression. Indeed, Buckingham thought him even too bashful to be poet laureate.[36] But Victor's story, while his facts may every one of them be correct, gives the impression that Gay was a mere yokel, a Stephen Duck let us say, who had never been near Leicester House before, whereas actually he had been on friendly terms

[35] Benjamin Victor, *The History of the Theatres of London and Dublin* (1761), II, 155-157; *Biographia Dramatica* (1812), II, 81-82. Also in *The British Magazine, or Monthly Repository for Gentlemen and Ladies*, VII, 184 (April, 1766).

[36] "The Election of a Poet Laureat in 1719," *The Works of John Sheffield, Duke of Buckingham* (1723), I, 199.

> *H—hs*, *F—ton*, and *G—y*, came last in the Train,
> Too modest to ask for the Crown they wou'd gain:
> *Phoebus* thought them too bashful, and said they would need
> More boldness if ever they hop'd to succeed.

with Caroline and her Court ever since the Princess had arrived in England ten years before.

The Captives was finally presented at Drury Lane on Wednesday, January 15, 1724. *The Daily Courant* records seven performances until Thursday of the following week, when it was displaced by *The Double Gallant*. Baker mentions nine performances, and the play may have been produced twice later, but I find no record. The first night was a gala performance, if we may trust the hostile note in *The Briton* for Wednesday, January 22.

> SIR: I was a Spectator, the first Night, at the Representation of the last new Play, called *The Captives;* when I was Witness to a Ceremony, which I can never judge to be either beneficial to the Author, or contribute much to the Entertainment of the Town. There were large Quantities of *Brandy* distributed amongst the *Footmen* in the *Boxes,* and that in so plentiful a manner, that several of them were carried out of the House dead drunk. This, it seems, is call'd *Christening a Play;* but I think it is such a *Christening* as ought not to be suffer'd in a civiliz'd Country, unless it were at the Performance of a *Lacquey-Poet.* I will assure you, I have no Prejudice to the Author, but heartily wish him, and every other Gentleman, who takes pains to divert the Town, all the Success they can propose to themselves: But I am afraid, if this *Hottentot* Custom prevails, it will be far from proving a Support to polite Writing; for the same Expedient may, with greater Probability of Success, be made use of to the Detriment, than the Advantage of an Author.

Fenton hints at another kind of stimulation that the play received. In a combination letter from Pope and Fenton to Broome, Fenton adds the postscript: "Gay's play had no success. I am told he gave thirty guineas to have it acted the fifth night."[37]

That letter was written on January 30 from Pope's house, and must have reflected Pope's opinion also. And yet, seven nights was a good run. If Gay gave thirty guineas to have it acted the fifth night, he must have done so in the expectation that the sixth performance, his second benefit, would more than

[37] Pope, *Works*, VIII, 75.

make up that loss. Moreover, within two or three weeks Young wrote to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: "For my theatrical measures are broken; Miriamne brought its author above £1500, The Captives above £1000, and Edwin now in rehearsal, has already, before acting, brought its author above £1000."[38]

It is hard, if not impossible, to reconcile these two stories. Courthope thought Fenton's story undoubtedly correct, and that the thousand pounds, if not mere rumor, must have been a subscription from friends. The play had every chance. The best actors in town—Booth, Wilks, Mrs. Porter, and Mrs. Oldfield—appeared in the cast. It was enthusiastically supported by royalty and a large circle of aristocratic patrons. In itself *The Captives* was not worse, and probably better than most of the "Oh! Huncamunca, Huncamunca, Oh!" tragedies that at the time won popular approval. Baker says it was acted "with great applause."[39]

Moreover, there must have been considerable interest in the play outside the circle of Gay's personal friends, for, numerous as these were, they could scarcely have bought up two editions of the play within as many months. No. 105 of *Pasquin* praised *The Captives* highly,[40] and Elizabeth Harrison wrote a special and very dull *Letter to Mr. John Gay, on his Tragedy, call'd, The Captives* (1724). Today we find it almost impossible to understand how a play of this sort ever could compete with the other entertainments available. This was the time, one should remember, when the public were offered such dramatic variety as *Jupiter and Europa.*

Here we behold the Power of Machinery when we see a Heathen God in an erect Posture shot from an Eminence of sixty or seventy Foot upon the Stage; and, when he has finish'd his Part, he takes the same Flight from below: The Transformation of *Jupiter* into a Bull, is done in Sight of the Audience; the Contrivance and

[38] *Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu,* II, 11.

[39] *Biographia Dramatica,* II, 81.

[40] "The last new Tragedy of *The Captives* seems to have miscarry'd, and to have been sacrific'd purely to the prevalent Folly of the Times. It is certain there was nothing wanting on the Author's Part, to entitle him to the highest Success; the Piece was written with the Justness and Exactness of an Ancient, and the Spirit and Variety of a Modern: But the *Million* it seems were otherwise engag'd: Everyone can't under-

Blake, alias Blueskin attempting to cut the Throat of Jonathan Wilde, on the Leads before the old Sessions house.

From "Tracts relating to the Beggar's Opera (1728-1771)," Forster Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum

Deception is so excellent, that we cannot account for it. These Experiments give our Mechanicks great opportunities of improving and growing excellent in their several Arts, which, I conceive, is of more Consequence to the Publick, than anything that is attempted at our Operas.[41]

As between this grand show and *The Captives,* most of us, I think, would call for the bull!

It is, perhaps, worth adding just at this point that one week after *The Captives* lapsed at Drury Lane there was acted at the other house a play which had some influence on Gay's imagination as he was mulling over various hints for what later took shape as *The Beggar's Opera.* This was Christopher Bullock's *A Match in Newgate.* On February 17, 1724, there appeared also at Drury Lane for one performance only a revival of Richard Brome's *The Jovial Crew.* We are still four years from the production of Gay's most famous piece, but it is important to keep in mind the accumulating suggestions. The popular skepticism on the subject of operatic productions is worth remembering too, since, as early as February, 1723, Gay shared, perhaps a little resentfully, the common man's scorn for their continued success.

VII

This year under consideration (1724) saw sensational developments in the city's attempt to deal with crime, a subject which by this time was beginning to fascinate Gay. The gangsters were precipitated into public notice by the trial of Joseph Blake in October. Blake had been arrested at the instigation of Jonathan Wild, the Al Capone of his time, the No. 1 enemy of society, receiver of stolen goods, later to figure as Peachum in *The Beggar's Opera.* As the trial progressed in Old Bailey and Blake saw that no hope remained for himself, he made a murderous attack on Wild with a penknife, and almost ended

stand what he hears, but everyone is capable of being pleas'd with what he sees; and so Doctor *Faustus* carried it, But it ought not to be omitted, to the Glory of this Author, that whatever else he miss'd, he was so happy as to receive the Approbation and the Tears of Her Royal Highness; an Honour which a wise Man will prefer to the Applause of a Thousand vulgar Theatres."

[41] *The Weekly Journal or Saturday's Post,* April 6, 1723.

the career of the man who had betrayed him. Wild was spared, however, to betray another accomplice, Jack Sheppard, before he himself was hanged on May 24, 1725. These were names! For the moment, however, Gay made little use of the public interest in Newgate heroes, beyond turning out a ballad called *Newgate's Garland: Being a New Ballad. Shewing How Mr. Jonathan Wild's Throat was cut from Ear to Ear with a Penknife, by Mr. Blake, alias Blueskin, the bold Highwayman, as he stood his Tryal in the Old-Bailey.* The main interest for us in this ballad lies in the similarity between the sentiment developed here and that which Gay elaborated later with so much success, the notion that human nature varies little from top to bottom of society.

> Through all the employments of life
> Each neighbour abuses his brother.

The courtier is as much a thief as Blake; only he gets a blue ribbon as a reward instead of a string.

> Knaves of old, to hide Guilt by their cunning Inventions,
> Call'd Briberies Grants, and plain Robberies Pensions;
> Physicians and Lawyers (who take their Degrees
> To be Learned Rogues) call'd their Pilfering, Fees;
> Since this happy Day,
> Now ev'ry Man may
> Rob (as safe as in Office) upon the Highway.
> For *Blueskin's* sharp Penknife hath set you at Ease,
> And every Man round me may rob, if he please.

Robbing on the highway is more honorable than the sort the Masters do in Chancery. This repetition of the same idea which Gay was writing to Mrs. Howard in August, 1723,[42] forms the basis of the satire on Bob Booty and the others in his play later.

Though the ballad appears starred, as not by Swift, in the 1747 edition of the *Miscellanies,* Mr. F. Elrington Ball has felt that Swift must have had some hand in its composition, largely, I suppose, because of the last stanza and its reference to Wood's half-pence.[43]

[42] Countess of Suffolk, *Letters,* I, 118.

[43] *Notes and Queries,* 12th Series, XII, 174 and 273 (March 3 and April 7, 1923).

What a Pother has here been with *Wood* and his Brass,
Who would modestly make a few Half-pennies pass!
The Patent is good, and the Precedent's old,
For *Diomede* changed his Copper for Gold:
But if *Ireland* despise
Thy new Half-pennies,
With more Safety to rob on the Road I advise.

There were two early printings of the poem, one as a broadside dated 1724-1725, now to be found in the British Museum in a volume of such pieces, some issued in Dublin and some in London. The second printing was on the back of the Postscript to the *St. James's Post* for November 28, 1715, which may be a misprint for 1725, but more probably can be explained, as Mr. Faber suggests,[44] by assuming that old blank sheets were used to economize on paper. It was somewhat unusual to print ballads of this sort in the newspapers, and anyway the news value of this one would be slight a whole year after the hanging of Blake. The ballad was revised in the second appearance with the meticulous care which Gay often devoted even to minor work. The care is particularly evident in that disputed last stanza where the pronouns have been altered to throw the emphasis on Wood, who is here addressed, not the "gallants of Newgate," nor Gay himself, as Mr. Faber imagines in his hypothetical account of the origin of these last two stanzas.

No, so far as we know, Gay had not written to Swift for two years, and to suppose that the ballad passed back and forth between Gay and Swift taking on accretions in the process is under these circumstances fantastic.[45] There is no reason to think that Swift would have been stimulated to write on such an incident, lurid enough for Londoners no doubt but not so exciting for the people of Dublin. There is only slight evidence that the first broadside was printed in Dublin, and the second one must certainly have been arranged by Gay. As for the

[44] *The Poetical Works of John Gay,* pp. xxvi-xxvii. See also *The Poems of Jonathan Swift,* ed. Harold Williams (1937), III, 1111-1113. Mr. Williams is doubtful, but thinks the poem may be Swift's.

[45] Pope, *Works,* VII, 55. Swift to Pope, Sept. 29, 1725: "I hear nothing of our friend Gay, but I find the court keeps him at hard meat."

scandal about Wood's half-pence, that was known in London as well as in Dublin, perhaps better. The King's mistress was involved, and the government distinctly embarrassed. Wood was the thief of the hour in high places, as Jonathan Wild was at the Old Bailey. Gay could have found no better name to point his moral.[46]

It is necessary to emphasize that no one writer has copyright privileges over any special event, or over any special way of thinking. The tendency to overlook this elementary principle has led to confusion about the authorship of another poem, *The Quidnuncki's: a Tale. Occasion'd by the Death of the Duke Regent of France.* This poem, since Bell's edition of 1773, has generally been attributed to Gay. Then presently along come critics, not brought up as children on Gay's *Fables* but with minds obsessed by *Gulliver,* and they decide on purely internal evidence that the poem must be Swift's.

> All at a Stand? You see great Changes?
> Ah, Sir! you never saw the *Ganges.*
> There dwells the Nations of *Quidnuncki's*
> (So *Monomotapa* calls Monkies:)
> On either Bank, from Bough to Bough,
> They meet and chat (as we may now.)
> Whispers go round, they grin, they shrug,
> They bow, they snarl, they scratch, they hug;
> And, just as Chance, or Whim provoke them,
> They either bite their Friends, or stroke them.

That could only have been written by Swift, these critics insist,[47] forgetting that before this (January, 1724) Gay had already been gathering hints from La Fontaine, and that his mind was developing a slightly more cynical edge. But apparently neither Swift nor Gay wrote this poem, if we may lean—perhaps too hard—on a statement by Dr. William Stratford, Canon of Christ

[46] Gay himself was a character in a Christmas pantomime performed at Drury Lane, called *Harlequin Jack Sheppard; or, The blossom of Tyburntree.*

[47] See F. Elrington Ball, *Swift's Verse* (1929), p. 199; W. Spencer Jackson, in Swift, *Prose Works,* ed. Temple Scott, XII, 213. Mr. Faber also thinks Swift had something to do with it.

Church, in a letter to the second Earl of Oxford, that Arbuthnot was the author.[48]

Many of these ephemeral pieces like the stories of old romance gravitated gradually towards the big reputations, towards Swift because of the impression the sheer weight of his intellect made on his generation, towards Pope because of the accidental circumstances of publication, and some tendency on his part, one fears, towards machination. Is it flattery alone that moved Swift to write to Pope the cryptic sentence, "Reputation you will take care to increase, though you have too much in conscience for any neighbour of yours to thrive while he lives by you"?[49]

The authorship of these occasional verses matters little enough. We can state the evidence, grow irreverent and insist that that is all we know on earth and all we need to know. But when the suggestion arises that Pope helped Gay with a work like *The Beggar's Opera*, because he altered two lines in one of the stanzas, and when Pope denies it in a pompous way that leaves us still guessing, it is time to call a halt to the process of attrition, and underline Gay's right to his own.

VIII

Meanwhile, through the summer of 1724, Gay was giving his spare time to the Burlingtons, to Mrs. Howard, and to Pope. He was staying with the Burlingtons at Chiswick, as Pope makes clear in his letters to Fortescue,[50] and from that base he made his way to town for business, and to Twickenham and Richmond for pleasure. Gay's work on Pope's edition of Shakespeare was finished by September;[51] Mrs. Howard kept

[48] Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Portland MSS* (1901), VII, 373. Letter from Dr. William Stratford to Harley: "I did not think Arbuthnot had had a genius for such performances. Your Lordship is much in the right, that he has no reason to be ashamed of it. Pope has the credit of it here, and has no reason to be displeased that another's child is laid to him. It does him as much credit as any of his own." See Professor Beattie's article, "The Authorship of 'The Quidnuncki's,'" *Modern Philology*, XXX, 317-320 (Feb., 1933); and an article by Harold Williams in the *Review of English Studies*, III, 212-214 (Feb., 1927). See also Mr. Williams's summary of the evidence in his *The Poems of Jonathan Swift* (1937), III, 1119-1120.

[49] Swift, *Letters*, III, 257.

[50] Pope, *Works*, IX, 100-101.

[51] *Ibid.*, VIII, 88.

him busy helping her with plans for her new house, Marble Hill, and organizing the household there.[52] Finally, shortly before September 17, Gay was ready for a holiday and went off to Bath with Dr. Arbuthnot.[53] There he had good company as usual, Lord and Lady Fitzwilliam and Lord Scarborough among the aristocrats,[54] and Dean Berkeley, who had just come from Ireland hot for converts to his Bermuda scheme, among the intellectuals.[55]

On his return to town, although his health was not altogether restored, Gay managed to get about among his friends with reasonable cheerfulness. He found Selwyn at Mrs. Howard's, Lord Cobham at Congreve's. Berkeley was in London also, printing his proposals and getting what support for his scheme he could from the Bishop of London. Fortescue was back from his visit to Barnstaple, and he and Gay were both anxious to get in touch with Pope as soon as possible.[56]

Gay must have got back to town early in November to be on the spot when the report got abroad that Blake had slit Jonathan Wild's throat with a penknife. Obviously the ballad was composed and on the streets almost immediately after the assault, or at least while everyone expected that Wild would die. Jonathan's wife is made a sad widow in one of the stanzas, while the refrain of all of them exults in his death, so that "every man round me may rob if he please." That piece, and one other, *To a Lady on her Passion for Old China,* are the only new poems that Gay published at this time. The latter poem was printed by Tonson in small quarto in 1725, and then disappears completely until reprinted by Potts in 1770. There is no certain evidence about its authorship, apart from content and style.[57] Who the lady was, if the author was thinking of any one lady, is unknown. One remembers Mrs. Howard furnishing her new house, and the Duchess of Queensberry, into

[52] See Lewis Melville, *Lady Suffolk and her Circle* (1924), p. 105.

[53] Pope, *Works,* IX, 102. [54] Countess of Suffolk, *Letters,* I, 176.

[55] Swift, *Letters,* III, 212; Pope, *Works,* VII, 426.

[56] *Ibid.,* VII, 426.

[57] See an article by Harold Williams in the *Review of English Studies,* VII, 79-80 (Jan., 1931). He confirms Gay's authorship.

the orbit of whose friendship Gay was at this time being more strongly drawn. The same old frivolous attitude towards the new science, of which all the Scriblerians were frequently guilty, is to be found here.

> Philosophers more grave than wise
> Hunt science down in Butterflies;
> Or fondly poring on a Spider,
> Stretch human contemplation wider;
> *Fossiles* give joy to *Galen's* soul,
> He digs for knowledge, like a Mole;
> In shells so learn'd, that all agree
> No fish that swims knows more than he!
> In such pursuits if wisdom lies,
> Who, *Laura*, shall thy taste despise?[58]

Moreover, Gay's growing scorn for the courtier's promises appears conspicuously.

> Are not Ambition's hopes as weak?
> They swell like bubbles, shine and break.
> A Courtier's promise is so slight,
> 'Tis made at noon, and broke at night.

During the summer of 1725, Gay was trying desperately to improve his position, and thought—as did his friends at this time—that the best way to do it was by close attendance at court. In June, he and Pope had joined a house party at Richings Park with Lord Bathurst and his friends, but they soon returned since Gay felt that he must be near Richmond.[59] Nor would he accept an invitation from the Honorable Robert Digby to continue the gay party a little later in Herefordshire. Digby was aware of his hopes and understood his excuses. "I hope Lord Bathurst, whose intentions were soon to survey these parts, will seduce you both to come with him. Yet I would not wish Gay so far from Richmond, to the ruin of any interest he may have begun to make there by a close attendance."[60]

The summer passed with little encouragement. Arbuthnot was dangerously ill in September, and Gay and Pope were

[58] Cf. opening lines of Pope's *Characters of Men.*
[59] Pope, *Works*, VIII, 331. [60] *Ibid.*, IX, 93.

frequently with him. On September 14, Pope wrote Swift despairing of Arbuthnot's recovery. The crisis passed, however, and Gay was able to get away for a visit to Amesbury, in Wiltshire, with the Queensberrys. This visit was soon interrupted by a message from Fortescue telling Gay of the death of some person whose place he evidently hoped to get, and, accordingly, we find him back in Twickenham by September 23, doing his best to remind the powerful of his continued existence. He seems inured by this time to the usual routine of promise and neglect, and writes to Fortescue: "One would think that my friends use me to disappointments, to try how many I could bear; if they do so, they are mistaken; for as I do not expect much, I can never be much disappointed."[61] Fortescue had some influence with Walpole, and one would have expected him to exert himself on Gay's behalf, but he was apparently unable to help. By the end of October, Gay knew that he was once more doomed to disappointment. On October 30 he wrote to his friend Brigadier General James Dormer, at that time Envoy Extraordinary at the Court of Lisbon, a gossipy letter about himself and his friends and mentioned his failure to get what he was hoping for.

There is never a day passes but I think of you & wish to see you; I have made all the enquiry I possibly could of your Welfare, but have been able to get very little intelligence; I believe you will think me sincere when I tell you that next to being witness that you are happy, one of the greatest Satisfactions I could have, is to hear you are so. I hope I have no occasion to make any professions of friendship to you; because I have really more of it than I can profess; so that I shall only think of giving you an account of your friends & among those myself in the remaining part of my Letter. Mrs Pulteney is brought to bed of a son; they are both very well, & Mr Pulteney is the happiest man alive. Lord & Lady Burlington are return'd to Chiswick from Yorkshire. Kent is employ'd in making vast Alterations in Newcastle-house in Lincoln's Inn fields. I din'd with him to day at Williams his Coffee-house, & he left me in order to pass his Sunday as usual at Chiswick. Mr Pelham came to town Yesterday for the Birthday to day from the Duke of Graftons; as did

[61] *Ibid.*, IX, 104.

several others of the Court, who will leave us again in a day or two. Faustina is engag'd to be here in the Spring and is to have a Benefit day for her performance the latter part of this Season, & is at a certain Salary for the next year. By what I hear, I think the King is not expected till after Christmas. I have been this Summer at Amesbury with the Duke of Queensberry; I came away from thence Post upon one of my usual prospects, & met with my usual Success, a disappointment. I have employ'd myself this Summer in Study, & have made a progress in it. What I am about is a Book of Fables, which I hope to have leave to inscribe to Prince William. I design to write fifty, all entirely new, in the same Sort of Verse as Prior's tales. I have already done about forty, but as yet there are very few of my friends know of my intention. The Duke of Queensberry is not yet come to town, but I intend to go no more into the Country this Winter. Duke Disney hath for this month or two past had a severe fit of illness, but is now pretty well recover'd; he is going to leave his Lodgings at Whitehall into a house in St James's place, & I have some prospect of getting them. The town is at present so very thin that I am forc'd to write you all these most important things of myself. I beg you upon all occasions if I can be of any Service to you to make use of me with the greatest Freedom, for it will be the greatest pleasure to me to have your Commands.[62]

As one can see from this letter, Gay's failure to better his position by court preferment had almost sickened him of further attempts. For the time being he made up his mind to be satisfied with the small post he had already and to concentrate his energies on the two literary projects which he in private was nursing. Some little pique began to develop naturally in his attitude to the government after this last failure. He became somewhat more careless of appearances politically, cultivated the friendship of Will Shippen, the Jacobite M.P., and found his doubts of the existing Walpole regime considerably strengthened by such conversation. Pope was not, I think, so helpful as he might have been. At any rate, it seems odd to find Pope in this same club-letter to Fortescue expressing himself facetiously about

[62] The two letters from Gay to Dormer which I print in this chapter were found by Professor Sherburn in the Rousham MSS and appear in this book through Mr. Sherburn's generous interest and by kind permission of T. Cottrell Dormer, Esq., of Cottisford House, near Brackley (Oxon.).

these very serious efforts of Gay, and then immediately going on to tell of courtesies extended by Walpole to himself, favors which Pope used presently to further the interests of the Abbé Southcote, his boyhood acquaintance. Swift was still interested in Gay's difficulties, and still sympathetic. He wrote to Pope on September 29: "I hear nothing of our friend Gay, but I find the Court keeps him at hard meat. I advised him to come over here with a Lord Lieutenant. Mr. Tickell is in a very good office."[63]

Both Swift and Pope seem to have felt that the reason for Gay's continual failure to recommend himself was his awkwardness in casual flattery. Swift once remarked that poets flatter only in print or in writing, but not by word of mouth, that they will give things under their hand which they will make a conscience of speaking.[64] Even his printed compliments Gay marred by sincerity or misdirection. Pope wrote a little later to Martha Blount: "I am grieved at Mr. Gay's condition in this last respect of dependence. He has merit, good-nature, and integrity, three qualities that I fear are too often lost upon great men; or at least are not all three a match for one which is opposed to them, flattery."[65]

This notion may be in part correct, but probably far more important than Gay's bashfulness about compliments to strangers was his friendship for the Bolingbroke group and his dependence on Mrs. Howard to forward his plans at court. Not that she ever misled him about the limitations of her power; indeed, several times she attempted to make her essential helplessness quite clear to him. At close quarters it was inevitable that he should misunderstand the situation. She was at this time forty-four years old, somewhat deaf, but still an exceedingly attractive woman, beautiful enough even ten years later to win a young husband. Her hold on the Prince's affections in 1725 was, however, probably slight, tolerated as she was—in place of a worse—by the Princess Caroline, who, though uncertain of her husband's affections, controlled quite satisfac-

[63] Swift, *Letters*, III, 278.
[64] *Ibid.*, III, 149.
[65] Pope, *Works*, IX, 308.

torily his mind and policies. At this distance it is easy enough to see that no vacancies in the prince's household would be filled at Mrs. Howard's suggestion, and certainly Mrs. Howard's patronage would not help Gay's cause with Walpole.

IX

It may be that at about this time Gay was forced to the same conclusion. In any case, he began his next approaches from a different angle, and sought to win the Princess Caroline's favor directly. The little prince, William Augustus, from whom Gay had had as yet neither expectations nor disappointments, was now a boy of four toddling about the gardens of Richmond Lodge on the lookout for playmates. Pope had written to Fortescue the year before retailing the gossip about Arbuthnot and Gay, Mrs. Howard and Marble Hill. "The little Prince William wants Miss Fortescue, or, to say truth, anybody else that will play with him."[66]

Now Gay's love of children is one of the many amiable aspects of his character. He was no doubt frequently the little chap's playmate when at Richmond calling on Mrs. Howard. He may have told the young prince stories. At any rate, some time before December 14, 1725, he was busy concocting fables for him. The inscription "invented for his amusement" which Gay finally placed in his dedication to *The Fables* is a statement of plain fact, not merely an effort to flatter the attention of an indulgent mother. Pope wrote to Swift on the above date:

> Gay is writing tales for Prince William; I suppose Philips will take this very ill, for two reasons: one, that he thinks all childish things belong to him, and the other, because he will take it ill to be taught that one may write things to a child without being childish.[67]

Fortunately, though the little child did not lead Gay eventually to the desired preferment, this work on *The Fables* did take his mind from the distractions of office-hunting that year and enabled him to concentrate his energies on poetry. But of that more hereafter.

[66] *Ibid.*, IX, 102.

[67] Swift, *Letters*, III, 295.

X

The most wonderful wonder of wonders that appeared to the wonder of the British nation in the spring of 1726 was the arrival of the copper-farthing Dean from Ireland, in spite of the competition he fell in with from the wonderful man from Germany.[68] Both these monsters were, shall we say, in the care of Dr. Arbuthnot, and were apparently exhibited to the Princess Caroline on the same occasion. Swift had arrived in London on March 20, or thereabouts, much to the joy of his old friends, who immediately led him a course through the town, as Pope puts it,[69] Arbuthnot, Bolingbroke, Pope and Gay, first, then Chesterfield and Pulteney, a dinner-party arranged by Peterborough and Harcourt to meet Walpole, visits to Lord Oxford at Down Hall and to Bathurst at Richings. Part of the time Swift shared Gay's apartments at Whitehall, and Gay was with him on most of his peregrinations. The social pace was rapid, and appears to have been actually accelerated as the summer drew on. Swift wrote to Lord Oxford, July 3, 1726, from Twickenham: "[Mr. Pope] prescribes all our visits without our knowledge, and Mr. Gay and I find ourselves often engaged for three or four days to come, and we neither of us dare dispute his pleasure. Accordingly this morning we go to Lord Bathurst, on Tuesday company is to dine here."[70] A few days later Swift wrote to Tickell: "I have lived these two months past for the most part in the country, either at Twickenham with Mr. Pope, or rambling with him and Mr. Gay for a fortnight together. Yesterday my Lord Bolingbroke and Mr. Congreve made up five at dinner at Twickenham."[71]

Lord Oxford was specially touched by this fresh conjunction of brilliance, remembering the days when his father had delighted in the society of these same four wits.[72] Bolingbroke was there to welcome them, and later to address them affectionately from the banks of the Severn as the three Yahoos

[68] *It Cannot Rain but it Pours, or London Strow'd with Rarities* (1726).
[69] Pope, *Works*, IX, 107.
[70] Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Portland MSS* (1901), VI, 15.
[71] Swift, *Letters*, III, 313.
[72] Pope, *Works*, VIII, 225.

of Twickenham, Jonathan, Alexander, John![73] Whatever Jonathan may have thought of mankind in general, he loved Alexander and John, and there was no biting and snarling and scratching among these friends. Familiarity bred increasing affection and respect. Swift was bewilderingly kind and considerate when Pope's aged mother was seriously ill in April, and the close terms on which he lived with Gay merely deepened their friendship. Perhaps the best proof of the sheer enjoyment Swift got out of this visit is to be found in the verses which his friend Sheridan produced shortly after Swift's return to Dublin in August. The dinner parties there had evidently got a surfeit of talk about London notabilities.

> What though you mayn't in Ireland hope
> To find such folk as Gay and Pope;
> If you with rhymers here would share
> But half the wit that you can spare,
> I'd lay twelve eggs, that in twelve days,
> You'd make a dozen of Popes and Gays.

A little later in "An Invitation to Dinner, from Doctor Sheridan to Doctor Swift," one finds still a shade of amusing peevishness:

> Let me be your Gay, and let Stella be Pope,
> We'll wean you from sighing for England I hope.[74]

A few days after Swift's departure for Ireland, there appeared in *Mist's Weekly Journal* (August 27, 1726) the ballad, *Molly Mog: or, the Fair Maid of the Inn.* This was in the main Gay's work; both Swift and Pope call it his, though it was composed on the journey which the three friends made to Bathurst's place, Cirencester Park, and it would be dangerous to suppose that under those circumstances any one of the three could compose anything unsupported by the others.[75] They had traveled by way of Windsor Forest, and spent one night at Wokingham, near Pope's old home. Here they were all

[73] Swift, *Letters*, III, 323.

[74] Swift, *Works*, ed. Temple Scott (1814), XV, 112, 141.

[75] It is assigned to Gay in Lintot's *Miscellany Poems* (1727), II, 138. Swift says that Gay wrote it; see *The History of the Second Solomon* (*Prose Works*, ed. Temple Scott, XI, 157).

impressed by the beauty of the landlord's daughter, whose praises drift down through the century on wings of song.[76] The editor of *Mist's Weekly Journal* says:

> We shall only observe, it was writ by two or three Men of Wit, (who have diverted the Publick both in Prose and Verse) upon the Occasion of their lying at a certain Inn at *Ockingham*, where the Daughter of the House was remarkably pretty, and whose Name is Molly Mog.

The charming simplicity of the measures and the singleness of the emotion suggested set everybody singing the ballad, and not only singing it, but adding verse after verse to suit occasions proper and improper. Several additional verses found their way into the pages of *Mist's Weekly Journal*, and two of them Gay placed in the poem when after numerous revisions he printed the final version of it in the *Miscellanies in Verse* (1727). Some of these experiments in imitation have not come down to us, notably one in which Arbuthnot, Pulteney, and Chesterfield were concerned at the expense of Lady Hervey. Arbuthnot described the incident to Swift (November 8, 1726):

> I gave your service to Lady Hervey. She is in a little sort of a miff about a ballad that was writ on her, to the tune of Molly Mog, and sent to her in the name of a begging poet. She was bit, and wrote a letter to the begging poet, and desired him to change two double entendres, which the authors, Mr. Pulteney and Lord Chesterfield, changed to single entendres. I was against that, though I had a hand in the first. She is not displeased, I believe with the ballad, but only with being bit.[77]

But *Molly Mog* was the property of no clever clique. The people loved it, and the fair maid of the inn was famous enough when she died to win obituary notice in the *Dublin Gazette* (March 18-22, 1766), "died greatly advanced in years," a rather surprising statement from the mathematical point of view.[78]

[76] *Notes and Queries*, 2d Series, VIII, 172, 175 (Aug. 27, 1859).

[77] Swift, *Letters*, III, 357.

[78] *Somerset House Gazette*, I, 17-18 (1824). In an article called "The October Fireside" one finds an account of Lintot's singing *Molly Mog*.

XI

Gay solaced himself after Swift's departure by visiting the Duke and Duchess of Queensberry in Oxfordshire and Petersham. They left for Amesbury on September 20, and Gay turned for social converse to Twickenham again, especially as Pope needed his help following the coach accident which had disabled one of his hands so that he could not write.[79] In the meantime, Gay had got Jervas's sheets, which Swift had been using, properly sent home again—mended, finely washed, and neatly folded up. A month later, October 22, 1726, he wrote Swift a specially detailed account of his affairs.

> I believe you will expect that I should give you some account how I have spent my time since you left me. I have attended my distressed friend at Twickenham, and been his *amanuensis*, which you know is no idle charge. I have read about half Virgil, and half Spenser's Fairy Queen. I still despise Court preferments, so that I lose no time upon attendance on great men; and still can find amusement enough without quadrille, which here is the universal employment of life.[80]

He speaks of attendance at the Guildhall in connection with his business as one of the commissioners of the lottery, and regrets that only one of his friends, the Duchess of Queensberry, has made any money under his administration. Gay's letter to Swift (September 16, 1726) states that he was seeing less of Mrs. Howard, though but a few days later she and Bolingbroke and Pulteney were joining with Pope and Gay in a Cheddar letter to Swift. His closest friends during these late months of the year were, as we have seen, Pulteney and his malcontents. Swift had been flirting with that group, and Pope also, though he meanwhile accepted Walpole's favors. When Gay replied to Swift's query, whether the mice who ate up his buttons were Whigs or Tories, he speculated on buying a turncoat for the birthday celebrations. Conversation with Swift, one feels, had almost made a politician of him. One sees the changing mood reflected in *The Fables* he was writing at this time.

[79] Swift, *Letters*, III, 340. [80] *Ibid.*, III, 352.

Many thought them overbold in their sarcasms on the courtiers.[81]

Most references to his own writings at this time are about *The Fables,* except those which concern some verses, *A Receipt for Stewing Veal,* which he sent to Swift as his contribution to the combination letter just referred to. These verses were a rhymed version of an actual receipt used by Monsieur Devaux, Pulteney's cook, riddled with mild ingenuity, and they probably gave the Dean and his ladies the base for a pleasant evening's conversation. It is perhaps unimportant to notice that a "pot of *Wood's* mettle" appears quite naturally here, just like "*Wood* and his Brass" in *Newgate's Garland.* These verses appeared credited to Swift in *The Weekly Journal: Or, British Gazetteer* for September 30, 1727, and called *An excellent Receipt to make good Soup.*

Among the letters which Gay wrote at this time perhaps the most interesting was the one addressed to his friend General Dormer in Lisbon and dated November 22, 1726. The reference in it to Voltaire is curious, especially as it corrects the usual idea that the great Frenchman learned English with phenomenal rapidity.

Though you have heard from me but once in form, it hath not been either for want of respect or friendship. I had the pleasure to hear of your health by the return of the fleet, and I really would have writ to you often, if I did not look upon myself as an unnecessary correspondence. I have as little prospect of being provided for as ever, so that I have not had the least good fortune to make me some amends for the loss of your company. I am about to publish a collection of Fables entirely of my own invention to be dedicated to Prince William, they consist of fifty, and I am oblig'd to Mr Kent & Wootton for the Designs of the Plates. The Work is begun to be printed, and is delay'd only upon account of the Gravers, who are neither very good or expeditious. I believe you must have heard that Mr Pelham is married to Lady Katharine Manners. Tis said that Mr Arundell is married to Lady Fanny, but as he is in the country, I believe, 'tis only the conjecture of the town. We have a Book lately publish'd here which hath of late taken up the whole conversation of

[81] Swift, *The Intelligencer,* No. 3.

the town. Tis said to be writ by Swift. It is called, The travells of Lemuell Gulliver in two Volumes. It hath had a very great sale. People differ vastly in their Opinions of it, for some think it hath a great deal of wit, but others say it hath none at all. As it hath been publish'd about a month, I fancy you must have either heard of it or seen it. We have a famous French Author in town, who upon a Quarrel with the Chevalier de Rohan is banish'd his Country. He hath been here about half a year, and begins to speak English very well. His name is Voltaire, the Author of Oedipe. He hath finish'd his Poem of the Ligue, which he intends to publish in England in Quarto with very fine copper plates which he hath got already grav'd by the best Gravers in Paris. I am told the Parliament will not sit till about the middle of January, so that the town is yet but thin. There is a Set of Italian Comedians who act twice a week at the Opera house, but they are very little approv'd of, for the Harlequin is very indifferent, so that they find but small encouragement. I was at Rousham twice last Summer in a visit which I find extreamly improv'd, and your Brother was with us once or twice at Middleton. Lord and Lady Burlington are return'd from Paris where they made a stay of about two months. Lord Chesterfield designs to take Lord Cadogan's house in case the Duke of Richmond does not go into it himself, in which as yet he is undetermin'd. All the Goods of my Lord Cadogan are to be dispos'd of by auction in the month of January next. You see, I send you the little trifling news of the town, I leave that of more consequence to others. I long for your company, but since I cannot have it, I wish I could be serviceable to you in any thing you will please to command me.

CHAPTER VI

RECOVERY

The Fables (1727), *The Beggar's Opera* (1728)

I

GAY HAD BEEN WORKING on *The Fables* at least since December, 1725, and his task was finished, except for annoying delays with the engravers, by October, 1726. The process of final revision was going on through September, and Gay expected to print about Christmas. Actually, the plates were not ready for publication with the text until early in March, 1727.

Swift felt that Gay was slow in completing his task, and an impatient remark in one of his letters brought forth later an illuminating account from Gay of the difficulty he found in the composition of these stories.

> Though this is a kind of writing that appears very easy, I find it the most difficult of any that I ever undertook. After I have invented one fable, and finished it, I despair of finding out another; but I have a moral or two more, which I wish to write upon.[1]

Swift's reply was consoling:

> There is no writing I esteem more than fables, nor anything so difficult to succeed in, which, however, you have done excellently well, and I have often admired your happiness in such a kind of performance, which I have frequently endeavoured at in vain. I remember I acted as you seem to hint; I found a moral first, and then studied for a fable, but could do nothing that pleased me, and so left off that scheme for ever. I remember one, which was to represent what scoundrels rise in armies by a long war, wherein I supposed the lion was engaged; and having lost all his animals of worth, at last Sergeant Hog came to be brigadier, and Corporal Ass a colonel, etc.[2]

[1] Swift, *Letters*, IV, 301.

[2] *Ibid.*, IV, 314.

I find no evidence that anyone suggested the idea of writing fables to Gay. Dr. Maty thinks it was Chesterfield's prompting, but gives no grounds for the notion.[3] For reasons at which I have already hinted, and which he himself puts down in epigram in one of *The Fables*, Gay was developing a certain reticence about his literary projects.

> No author ever spar'd a brother,
> Wits are game-cocks to one another.[4]

Pope wrote to Fortescue about this time giving news of Gay's physical movements, but was extremely vague about his mental activity, "yet I believe with his head turning round upon some work or other."[5]

The idea of writing fables was not surprising in 1726; indeed, it would have been almost more surprising for a writer not to try his hand at this genre. Translations of Aesop, like that by L'Estrange in 1691, had been numerous and popular. Adaptations of beastlore to local scenes and political crises of one sort or another appeared frequently. Aesop was carried to Oxford and Tunbridge and even to Portugal to view the intellectual and social follies of the current generation. Anthony Alsop did Aesopic fables in Latin, "exquisitely written," says Joseph Warton. Yalden, Locke, and Mandeville all found the form irresistible. Fables for the female sex, fables on the current posture of affairs, Phaedrus, La Fontaine, Pilpay, La Motte, Allan Ramsay, Swift, translations, originals! The wonder was, not that the idea occurred to Gay, but that he dared essay the form with such a bewildering array of competitors. He outdistanced them all. There have been over three hundred and fifty editions of his work, most of them before 1890. By that time, the popularity of this most popular book had become somewhat dimmed. Schoolboys no longer used *The Fables* as a text. No doubt the versions in Urdic and Bengali poetry had been for some time neglected. Even so, eleven editions have ap-

[3] *The Miscellaneous Works of the late Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield*, ed. M. Maty, M.D. (1777), I, 39-40 and note.

[4] First Series, Fable X.

[5] Pope, *Works*, IX, 110.

peared since 1890, and four since 1920.[6] The drawings for the original edition were designed by William Kent, Burlington's protégé and Gay's friend, and by Wootton, and they were engraved by Fourdrinier, Van der Gucht, and others.[7] The edition of 1779 with Bewick's cuts is one of the most famous of the later editions, though Stockdale's edition of 1794, which contains nine plates designed and engraved by William Blake, and many drawings by other artists, brings a high price at sales. There were several French translations, at least one German, and one Italian translation, besides the Indian ones already mentioned.

As for contemporary notices, before the first year was out, Mrs. Barber—Swift's acquaintance—was writing verses in praise of *The Fables*,[8] *Brice's Weekly Journal* had published an essay on Fable XVIII,[9] and Young had written rather spitefully to Tickell: "Gay has just given us some Fables, 50 in Number & about five are tolerable."[10]

Thus the long chorus begins, hardly of praise and censure, for the fables were soon so well known that people quoted from them and referred to them without stopping to estimate their quality.[11] Young parsons made presents of them to the ladies, and exercised their ingenuity on proper inscriptions, like the following:

> To you, Miss Thomas, Gay presents
> His most respectful compliments,
> And begs, that with your Tea sometimes,

[6] For bibliographical details, see W. H. K. Wright's edition (1923).

[7] Swift later made use of Gay's experience with engravers and told Motte to consult Gay about the illustrations for *Gulliver's Travels*. See Swift, *Letters*, III, 440.

[8] *Ibid.*, IV, 22.

[9] *Brice's Weekly Journal*, April 12, 1728: "The celebrated Mr. *Gay* has furnished me with a Fable adapted to my purpose, which may give Diversion to those of my Readers who as yet never saw it."

[10] Richard Eustace Tickell, *Thomas Tickell and the Eighteenth Century Poets (1685-1740)*, p. 131.

[11] Wesley thought Dan Chaucer's tales would be outshone by Dan Durfey's, sooner than Gay's name would fail. "An Epistle from Mr. Pope to Mr. Gay," in *Miscellanea* (1727), I, 136:

> Dan Chaucer's *Tales*, Dan Durfey shall outshine,
> And Philips' *Pastorals* compare with Mine,
> Than Gay forgotten lye.

You'll mix a Spoonful of his Rhimes.
He promises he'll never wound
Your Ears, with one licentious sound.
For, to the Arts of faithless Men,
In Virtue's Cause, he draws a Pen.
Of Birds and Beasts he only sings:
And Birds and Beasts are harmless Things.
No snares they lay for artless Youth:
They'll only cheat you into Truth.

This was supposed to be the main virtue of the poems, "to mark our faults and not offend us," as another writer put it.[12]

One admirer uses *The Fables* to point a moral against his enemy Garrick.[13] Horace Walpole seems to have been impressed particularly by the fable of the sick fox. He warns his friend Henry Conway against giving extravagant presents on his return from abroad:

. . . but as the sick fox in Gay's *Fables* says (for one always excepts oneself),

A chicken too might do me good—

I allow you to go as far as three or even five guineas for a snuff-box for me.[14]

Garrick himself is credited with the fable addressed to the Earl of Chesterfield, called *The Petition of the Fools to Jupiter.*

From *Grecian* Aesop, to our Gay,
Each fabulist is pleas'd to say,
That Jove gives ear to all petitions
From animals of all conditions;
Like earthly kings he *hears* their wants,
And like them too, not always *grants*.[15]

Gay's stories and his expressions, especially those with an epigrammatic turn, soon became household words. In 1828, when a certain Ingram Cobbin explains in his *Elements of Arithmetic*

[12] Myles Cooper, *Poems on Several Occasions* (Oxford, 1761), p. 149.

[13] *A Letter to a certain Patentee, in which the Conduct of Managers is Impartially considered* (1747), p. 20.

[14] Walpole, *Letters*, ed. Mrs. Paget Toynbee (1904), IX, 112-113; VIII, 218.

[15] *The Fugitive Miscellany* (1774), I, 25.

for Children how to write a bill, he puts Gay's *Fables* in a list among commonplace articles, like a ream of paper, a stick of wax, a prayer book, a Bible in Morocco, an almanac, that form his illustrations. The Victorians might disapprove of *Nelly*, or *Work for a Cooper*, but they read *The Fables* with pleasure.

Sometimes there is an attempt at criticism. A Balliol College poet (1749) found that Gay's well-blended shadows convey truth pleasantly, and that his trifles rise to elegance.[16] Christopher Smart thought there was a great resemblance between Phaedrus and Gay.[17] Warton brought the heavy guns to bear, and wrote:

> His fables, the most popular of all his works, have the fault of many modern fable-writers, the ascribing to the different animals and objects introduced, speeches and actions inconsistent with their several natures. An elephant can have nothing to do in a bookseller's shop. They are greatly inferior to the fables of *la Fontaine*, which is perhaps the most unrivalled work in the whole French language.[18]

In his *Life of Gay* Dr. Johnson was careful to define a fable exactly, and pointed out that Gay's poems do not conform to any rigid standard:

> A *Fable* or *Apologue*, such as is now under consideration, seems to be, in its genuine state, a narrative in which beings irrational, and sometimes inanimate, *arbores loquuntur, non tantum ferae*, are, for the purpose of moral instruction, feigned to act and speak with human interests and passions. To this description the compositions of Gay do not always conform. For a Fable he gives now and then a Tale or an abstracted Allegory; and from some, by whatever name they may be called, it will be difficult to extract any moral principle. They are, however, told with liveliness; the versification is smooth, and the diction, though now and then a little constrained by the measure or the rhyme, is generally happy.

Among the modern critics, W. E. Henley is most severe. He finds the morality of *The Fables* commonplace, and insists

[16] *An Accurate tho' Compendious Encomium on the most Illustrious Persons, Whose Monuments are Erected in Westminster Abbey* (1749), p. 25.

[17] *A Poetical Translation of the Fables of Phaedrus* (1765), Dedication, p. iv.

[18] Joseph Warton, *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope* (5th ed., 1806), II, 245.

that they lack simplicity, wit, wisdom, humanity, dramatic imagination, and expression. He can see no attempt at a proper union of sense and manner. He thinks the poems utterly monotonous in style, lacking power in invention and in distinguishing character.[19]

For Dr. Johnson the fables are not uniform enough; for Henley they are too uniform. Dr. Johnson finds the morality not sufficiently conspicuous; Henley wearies of the moralizing and finds it commonplace. Out of the fifty tales in this first series, there are seven that have no right by definition to be called fables, though the "morals" of six of those seven and of all the other forty-three are plain enough. Some readers have professed themselves wearied by the frequent references to the courtier's trade. Gay does warn against the dangers of sycophancy more or less directly in nine of the stories, but one should remember that the poems are addressed to a royal prince who will be surrounded by flatterers inevitably, and who may as well understand their wiles. The child, Prince William, we fear, was influenced as little by these lessons against flattery as he was by the equally insistent warnings against cruelty. Some of the phrases in Fables I and IX have an uncanny prophetic tone to us who know the later story of this hero of Culloden—"the bones that whiten all the land," "the butcher trained." The stories are not for the most part original, nor do they have any great dramatic force, but they do appeal strongly to the pictorial imagination. Even the one about the elephant in the bookshop, of which Warton disapproves, shows capacity for turning the grotesque to account in a way that pleases us grownups at least, and might please some children.

> The Bookseller, who heard him speak,
> And saw him turn a page of *Greek*,
> Thought, what a genius have I found!
> Then thus addrest with bow profound.
>
> Learned Sir, if you'd employ Your pen
> Against the senseless sons of men,
> Or write a history of *Siam*,

[19] W. E. Henley, *Views and Reviews* (1890), pp. 183-187.

No man is better pay than I am;
Or, since you're learned in *Greek*, let's see
Something against the Trinity.

When wrinkling with a sneer his trunk,
Friend, quoth the Elephant, you're drunk;
E'en keep your money, and be wise;
Leave man on man to criticize,
For that you ne'er can want a pen
Among the senseless sons of men,
They unprovok'd will court the fray,
Envy's a sharper spur than pay,
No author ever spar'd a brother,
Wits are game-cocks to one another.

"The Fox at the Point of Death" has the same power to create an image, as also the one about the two monkeys at Southwark Fair watching the acrobats and quite certain that men spend all their time trying to imitate the monkey tribe.

For how fantastick is the sight,
To meet men always bolt upright,
Because we sometimes walk on two!
I hate the imitating crew.

Gay's real interest in animals is constantly apparent, as is the calm sanity of his views on man and his relation to the universe. Fable XLIX, for instance, notices the habit all creatures have of making themselves the focal point of all creation; man most of all, as he views earth, ocean, sky, beasts, birds, and fish, the day, the night, the various year, thinks all things created to please him. One of the fables touches love, and another, with rather more of the macabre in its images than one would expect, deals with the Court of Death. There is even a touch of Spenser's manner in this poem.

The verses are smoothly turned, with very few double rhymes, and lack the jerkiness of the true Hudibrastic. Nor is there any large element of the epigrammatic, though some few of the lines are crisp enough to pass into proverbial usage. No personal allusions occur, except the opening lines of compli-

ment to the young Duke of Cumberland, and the graceful reference to himself in the last fable.

> A Hare, who, in a civil way,
> Comply'd with ev'rything, like *Gay*,
> Was known by all the bestial train,
> Who haunt the wood, or graze the plain:
> Her care was, never to offend,
> And ev'ry creature was her friend.

II

Gay was interested in a mild way that winter in the publication of Motte's *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse*. Pope was arranging the material and doing the necessary editorial work and by February 18, 1727, was pretty well finished with the task and able to write to Swift:[20]

> Our Miscellany is now quite printed. I am prodigiously pleased with this joint volume, in which methinks we look like friends, side by side, serious and merry by turns, conversing interchangeably, and walking down hand in hand to posterity, not in the stiff forms of learned authors, flattering each other, and setting the rest of mankind at nought, but in a free, unimportant, natural, easy manner; diverting others just as we diverted ourselves.[21]

These volumes were not published until the autumn, however, and by that time, in addition to a number of minor pieces known to be Gay's, a few other poems were ready the authorship of which remains doubtful, though they have been generally accepted as Gay's since Bell printed them in his edition of the *Works* in 1773. One or two of these may have been combination affairs. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu speaks of a ballad of this sort in a letter to her sister about May, 1727.[22] This has generally been assumed to refer to *A Ballad on Quadrille. The Quidnuncki's* appeared at this time also, and I am still inclined to feel that Gay had a share in this, especially when I compare the style and diction of the piece with

[20] The preface is dated May 27, 1727. "George Paston" says that Motte paid £225 for the copyright of the *Miscellanies*, and that Gay and Arbuthnot received £50. See her *Mr. Pope* (1909), I, 333.

[21] Swift, *Letters*, III, 380.

[22] *Letters and Works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, I, 506.

Fable XL. For the authorship of two other poems in the *Miscellanies*, *A New Song of New Similes* and *Ay and No*, no fresh evidence has appeared. *Ay and No* is probably Swift's; *A New Song* may stand as Gay's on the traditional basis only.

During the year 1727, a second edition of Steele's *Poetical Miscellanies* appeared, and into it crept anonymously the song called *The Coquet Mother and the Coquet Daughter*. This poem had not appeared in the edition of 1713. It was apparently not so well known as many of Gay's other songs, for *The Publick Register: or, the Weekly Magazine* (January 3, 1741) published it as a "*Song* by *Mr. Gay*, never before printed." It did, however, attain the distinction of a separate folio printing with music by Dr. John Worgan about the middle of the century, and found a place in Potts's edition of Gay's *Works* (1770) and in succeeding collections.

By February 1, 1727, Swift is writing to Mrs. Howard, the "Sieve Yahoo," telling her to get her house and wine ready, so that he and Gay may have free access to them while she is safe at Court, for, "as to Mr. Pope, he is not worth mentioning on such occasions." Gay himself was hardly worth mentioning on such occasions that winter and spring. Arbuthnot wrote Swift in November that Gay had had a little fever but was pretty well recovered. Gay wrote on February 18, 1727: "I have been very much out of order myself for the most part of the winter; upon my being let blood last week, my cough and my headache are much better."[23] He was careful to refuse invitations that he knew might prove disastrous, and was making a practice of walking two hours every morning in the park. Even as late as May 6, Congreve was still worried about him.[24] By that time, he had been swept, with Swift's return to London, into a whirlpool of social and political activities, and the effect of this close association with Swift on Gay's personal fortunes and misfortunes was marked. *The Fables* had appeared, and Gay was hoping through Mrs. Howard and her friend the Speaker, Sir Spencer Compton, to obtain some recognition for his work. This expected favor seemed much nearer when George I died

[23] Swift, *Letters*, III, 382.

[24] Pope, *Works*, VI, 417.

on June 11. Swift, political buzzard as he sometimes showed himself, had at first looked for favors from Walpole and, when rebuffed, turned the engines of his conversational rhetoric to the support of Pulteney, Wyndham, Bolingbroke, and the "patriots." He wrote to Sheridan a month before the death of the King:

> We are here in a strange situation; a firm settled resolution to assault the present administration, and break it if possible. It is certain that Walpole is peevish and disconcerted, stoops to the vilest offices of hiring scoundrels to write Billingsgate of the lowest and most prostitute kind, and has none but beasts and blockheads for his penmen, whom he pays in ready guineas very liberally. I am in high displeasure with him and his partisans.[25]

It is clear that the opposition were using the same tactics with Mrs. Howard that Harley had employed with Abigail Hill years before, but they reckoned without the new Queen. Caroline was an astute woman and proposed to be nobody's fool. The new King asked Sir Spencer Compton, his treasurer, to draw up the declaration on finance for the Privy Council. Compton was unequal to this task as he was to the heavier work of forming a new ministry. He had to call in the aid of Walpole, and the bewildered patriots presently realized that the great Prime Minister with Caroline's wise support was just as steady in the government of the nation as he ever had been. Both Compton and Mrs. Howard were forced to cover, scarcely able to get what they wanted for themselves, and quite unable to help their ambitious friends. Speaker Compton became "Sneaker" Compton to Swift and his friends, the *Craftsman* crew, and they all had to wait fifteen years for another chance.

The Fables came out in March, and from the beginning Gay tried to keep his expectations low. Mrs. Howard told him the Queen's remark about "taking up the hare," and how her mistress had bade her to put her in mind, in settling the family, to find some employment for Gay.[26] That at least was encouraging. Both Bolingbroke and Arbuthnot had their doubts, how-

[25] Swift, *Letters*, III, 388. [26] *Ibid.*, IV, 375.

ever. Apparently they thought him not sufficiently complaisant to rise. That summer Bolingbroke wrote to Swift:

> I wish John Gay success in his pursuit; but I think he has some qualities which will keep him down in the world. Good God! what is man, polished, civilized, learned man. A liberal education fits him for slavery; and the pains he has taken give him the noble pretension of dangling away life in an ante-chamber, or of employing real talents to serve those who have none; or, which is worse than all the rest, of making his reason and his knowledge serve all the purposes of other men's follies and vices.[27]

This sort of moralizing Bolingbroke delighted in, and we need not take it too seriously. All that group fresh from their disappointments were feeling at the moment more poignantly than usual the power of cunning, the falsehood and self-interest that vitiates friendships.[28] As late as October 12, Swift still hoped that his Whitehall landlord was nearer a place than when he left him, "as the preacher said, the Day of Judgment was nearer than ever it had been before." As far as Gay's fate was concerned, the day of judgment must have been that day or the day after. For the lists had appeared; Fazakerly was down as Gentleman Usher to the Princess Mary, and Gay Gentleman Usher to the Princess Louisa.[29] The post was worth £150 a year, and whatever duties it entailed must have been light, since the Princess was but two years old. Gay had no wish to have his liberty curtailed and his allegiance to the Court party bought at so slight a figure, however, and he promptly and as courteously as possible declined the office. His friends approved his action. In his Homeric security Pope preached the virtues of independence. Swift blamed both Mrs. Howard and Walpole, the latter because he had believed Gay the author of a libel against himself and had borne an ill report of Gay to the

[27] *Ibid.*, III, 449. Bolingbroke's intimacy with Gay at this time is clear from a note he sent to Swift: "Let me know how you are. Say something kind from me to Pope. Toss John Gay over the water to Richmond, if he is with you. Adieu" (*ibid.*, III, 448).

[28] See letter from Pulteney to Francis Colman, Sept. 21, 1727 (*Posthumous Letters addressed to Francis Colman*, 1820, p. 11).

[29] *The Postman*, Oct. 28, 1727.

Queen.[30] Walpole was aware of Gay's continued friendship with Swift and Pulteney and Bolingbroke, and whether any particular libel came from his pen or not was a matter of indifference to the great man, since all who knew Gay knew that no post, no matter how attractive, would make him readjust his friendships to please anybody. Near *The Craftsman,* he might at any moment write for it, and Walpole's favors went only to those whose promises to pay for value received could be depended on.

Even Arbuthnot felt that "there was a fatality upon poor John Gay," and that it would not be well to let him buy an annuity on one's life. Walpole's bitter hostility to the Pulteney group—for they had shaken him, and the outcome was for a time uncertain—accounts for his discouragement of Gay's pretensions at this time, and all that Mrs. Howard could do had no effect on the issue whatever.[31] If anything, her representations to the Queen would prejudice Gay rather than aid him. The Queen was, even so, pleasantly disposed towards Gay, and thought, I suppose, that the post she offered would satisfy him. She certainly had no intention of insisting that he have a better one in the face of Walpole's opposition.

One thing more remains to be said on this subject. In the same letter in which Gay announced his disappointment to Swift (October 22, 1727), he informed him facetiously that now that he had no Court attendance to bother him he could accept Swift's advice and go into Newgate for a time to get the proper local color for his opera, but, said he, my opera is already finished. This was *The Beggar's Opera,* filled as we know with tart satire on Walpole and Townshend. One wonders just how much of this satire was added or more sharply pointed after Gay found that he could not get what he wanted. Very little change, it seems to me, could have been made, since after all the whole idea of the play is to make the rogues and gangsters of Newgate a type for the kind of men that were running the government. The opera was written under "patriot" inspiration, and Walpole

[30] Countess of Suffolk, *Letters,* I, 399.

[31] See the letter from Lady Betty Germaine to Swift, Feb. 8, 1733 (*ibid.,* II, 54).

was certainly right in thinking he would get small thanks for favors. When Gay started the play, his opposition friends were entertaining high hopes; Bob Booty would soon be chased out of power, and *The Beggar's Opera* would be just the coup de grâce he deserved. Instead of this, Walpole stayed on, firmer in his seat than ever. Gay was distracted, with a play on his hands satirizing Walpole, and Walpole still in power. The news that Gay would be offered the post of Gentleman Usher leaked out presently, that is, before Swift's departure for Ireland on September 18. No wonder Gay was inattentive too poetical conversation and kept mumbling, as Swift later told the Duchess of Queensberry, "Well, I am determined not to accept the employment of gentleman-usher to the Princess." Entangled in the wrong friendships, he had to give up the post or his play, and he chose to give up the post. But it was an effort!

Mrs. Howard understood him better at this time than any of the rest of his friends. When he was with the Queensberrys in October just after he had sent his refusal, she wrote him:

> So much for her grace: now for yourself, John. I desire you will mind the main chance, and be in town time enough to let the opera have play enough for its life, and for your pockets. Your head is your best friend; it would clothe, lodge, and wash you; but you neglect it, and follow that false friend, your heart, which is such a foolish tender thing, that it makes others despise your head that have not half so good a one upon their own shoulders: in short, John, you may be a snail, or a silk-worm, but by my consent you shall never be a *hare* again.[32]

This was a far more inspiring letter than Pope's platitudinous patronizing, or Swift's misunderstanding of his reasons for refusal and suggestion that the ministers might still do something for him. Obviously, Swift's notion that the place was not good enough for him told only part of the story.

> Say, had the Court no better place to choose
> For thee, than make a dry-nurse of thy Muse?
> How cheaply had thy liberty been sold,
> To squire a royal girl of two years old:

[32] *Ibid.*, I, 283.

In leading strings her infant steps to guide,
Or with her go-cart amble side by side![33]

The third line here is the important one. Gay had to keep free or murder his poetical infant in its cradle. He had probably not at first realized that, but by September it was clear. A letter from Pope to Martha Blount supports this contention also, if we could only be sure of the date. Pope is referring to Gay: "I am sure his late action deserves eternal favour and esteem: Lord Bathurst was charmed with it, who came hither to see me before his journey."[34] Pope would surely not have spoken so extravagantly about Gay's refusal, if it had been based on peevish vanity, nor in all probability would Bathurst have approved. Moreover, having turned his back on court preferment, Gay immediately set about doing what he could to improve his financial position. Arbuthnot tells of his efforts to buy a small place in the Customs House which was to bring him in about a hundred a year. Unfortunately, the man who at first wished to sell repented, and refused to part with his place.[35] Gay, the most refractory, honest, good-natured man, as Swift calls him, certainly had a discouraging time of it that autumn. He could help his friends, as he did Mrs. Howard in arranging financial settlements with her husband,[36] and Swift by looking after the designs for *Gulliver's Travels* with Motte and Wootten, but he could not as yet do a great deal to help himself. That would come presently.

Whether from repeated disappointments, or from increasing age, or from the company he kept, Gay was developing at this time a quiet cynicism in his attitude toward worldly affairs. The first series of *The Fables* shows little of this, and yet at the very time he was preparing these for the press (February 18, 1727), he complained to Swift that contempt of the world was growing

[33] Swift, *Works*, ed. Scott, XIV, 270. See also Swift's letter to Carteret, Jan. 18, 1728 (*Letters*, IV, 2): "Your friend Walpole has lately done one of the cruelest actions that ever I knew, even in a Minister of State, these thirty years past, which if the Queen hath not intelligence of, may my right hand forget its cunning."

[34] Roscoe dated the letter 1727 (Pope, *Works*, IX, 308).

[35] Swift, *Letters*, III, 434.

[36] Memorandum of Mr. Gay relative to the differences between Mrs. Howard and Mr. Howard, Dec. 16, 1727 (British Museum *Addit. MSS* 22626. f. 33).

upon him. He had reached the stage when he realized the hollowness of most pretensions and criticized within himself the lack of laudable ambition. Now this attitude may have been merely a pose with Gay, as it was with so many of his friends. Bolingbroke's letters are filled to nausea with just this kind of sentiment, and even Swift could descend to it when he thought it might be useful to mislead his enemies. He starts sentimentalizing in that fashion in a letter to Pope (June 1, 1728), and then recovers rapidly in a way that lets the whole secret out.

I look upon my Lord Bolingbroke and us two, as a peculiar triumvirate, who have nothing to expect or to fear; and so far fittest to converse with one another, only he and I are a little subject to schemes, and one of us, I will not say which, upon very weak appearances, and this you have nothing to do with.[37]

The rest of them were full of schemes, but it suited their purposes to affect an air of philosophic aloofness, as if they alone had solved the problems of existence; if the tired world would only realize the corruption and chicanery of present leaders and turn to them for guidance, all would be well. In the meantime, England, they thought, was well along on the road to ruin, and good men like themselves were helpless. One can appreciate the exasperation and bitterness of Horace Walpole, when he later looked back on this time of his father's government, and realized the ingratitude and shallow pride of some of his opponents.

Last night, at Strawberry Hill, I took up, to divert my thoughts, a volume of letters to Swift from Bolingbroke, Bathurst, and Gay; and what was there but lamentations on the ruin of England, in that era of its prosperity and peace, from wretches who thought their own want of power a proof that their country was undone! Oh, my father! twenty years of peace, and credit, and happiness, and liberty, were punishments to rascals who weighed everything in the scales of self![38]

These were the men, apart from Arbuthnot and Pope, that Gay saw most at that time, Pulteney, Bolingbroke, Wyndham,

[37] Swift, *Letters*, IV, 33.

[38] Walpole to Horace Mann, Jan. 13, 1780 (Walpole, *Letters*, XI, 102).

Bathurst, and even Will Shippen. It would not have been surprising if he had adopted their general attitude without criticism, but he probably was not so naïve. He liked these men personally; they were his friends, and most of them had been so for a long time. He was well aware of their shortcomings, and let us hope that he saw the vapidity of most of Bolingbroke's moralizing and the self-seeking of Pulteney as clearly as he understood the corrupt methods of Walpole's administration. Certainly in the noisy bickerings of faction he failed to appreciate Walpole's full value to the nation. On the one side he saw the clawing and scratching in *The Craftsman's* pages, on the other Walpole's friends, the Pelhams, busy arranging elections, and he might well have been filled with disgust by both groups, if his essentially amiable nature had so permitted. As it was, his cynicism took a more gracious form, and turned to laughter. He cared little whether the mice that ate the buttons off his coat were Whigs or Tories, and speculated with amusement on whether the new jacket he must get for the birthday had not after all better be a turncoat. Mankind probably are but little odious vermin, but even so they are worth watching and worth laughing at, and the curious parallels in all the employments of life might make fascinating designs for drama.

III

Out of some such complex of ideas arose, it seems to me, Gay's most famous play, *The Beggar's Opera*. It may be, though that seems rather doubtful, that the little hint about a Newgate pastoral that Swift had given Gay back in 1716 had stuck in his mind all these years. That idea he had taken and used almost immediately in *The Espousal*. Eight or ten years later with the town suddenly Newgate-conscious over the careers of Jack Sheppard and Jonathan Wild, Gay had written his *Newgate's Garland*, a ballad sufficiently well known to find a place in a play of 1724 called *Harlequin Sheppard*. Gay certainly would not need to remember a casual phrase repeated by Pope from one of Swift's letters to be aware of the possibility

of romance, of sentiment, of satire in a Newgate setting for a play.

Moreover, many aspiring playwrights of that time were using the old gaol as a picturesque background for their scenes. The cash-receipt book of Lincoln's Inn Fields shows, for instance, that Christopher Bullock's *Match in Newgate* had been performed on May 23, 1727, again on November 22 and on December 27 of the same year.[39] Brome's old play *A Jovial Crew, or The Merry Beggars* had been in stock for many years. Mr. Schultz mentions two other earlier plays that may have encouraged Gay in his idea of changing the Newgate pastoral to a Newgate comedy.[40] These were *Harlequin Sheppard*, produced and printed in 1724, and *The Prison Breaker, or the Adventures of Jack Sheppard*, a farce that was printed in 1725, but took the boards only after Walker had reworked it into *The Quaker's Opera* in 1728 following the success of *The Beggar's Opera*. Gay had almost certainly read *The Prison Breaker*—parallels of name and scene occur—and most likely he knew *Harlequin Sheppard*, since his own ballad was used in it, but these plays and other comedies of low life current were for the most part flat, stale, and unprofitable, shot through with false sentiment, emotional vaporizing, and dreary moralizing, and they could have given Gay very little assistance in his opera. All we need to say is that a succession of such plays no doubt forced him to recognize the possibilities of the subject and to speculate on his own ability to handle it.

About this time Gay was showing signs of more independence of mind than the critics are usually inclined to allow him. He was beginning to feel that he preferred to work alone. The letters to and from his friends make that clear enough. Pope's refusal to talk about the literary projects Gay had in mind when *The Beggar's Opera* was taking form is rather surprising. Gay asked no hints from Arbuthnot.[41] He changed the whole design

[39] Allardyce Nicoll records six performances that year. See *A History of Early Eighteenth Century Drama 1700-1750* (1925), p. 300.

[40] William Eben Schultz, *Gay's Beggar's Opera, Its Content History and Influence* (New Haven, 1923), p. 169.

[41] Swift, *Letters*, IV, 12. Swift to Gay, Feb. 26, 1728: "How is the Doctor? Does he not chide that you never called upon him for hints?" Pope says in Spence

From the Gabrielle Enthoven Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum

for his great work early, and when Swift disapproved persisted in following his own notion. He was by this time aware of his own peculiar powers, and proposed to develop a form that would finally bring them into play, whether that form was conventional or not. He knew in the first place his real power to see and to describe low life; he was the prince of street-corner poets. He could hit the taste of the town in ballads, in tales, in more formal verse like *Trivia*, because he showed men the life they were themselves leading. He did not need to go to Newgate to get color for his play. He had the poet's intuition and saw Newgate characters all about him. All he had to do was to add that larger significance, the symbol as well as the sign, to strip off that universal suit of clothes and show Nature naked or in but ragged underwear. His characters would have the soul of goodness beneath evil appearances, but there was to be genuine evil there too, and the humor as well as the truth of the piece was to show humanity as much of a muchness, the Newgate thieves and whores taking pattern from gentility. Thus Gay undertook not only to copy faithfully the manners of jail and tavern and brothel, which he knew well enough from 'prentice days and later Bohemian revelings, but to add satirical point to his pictures, and attack heart and head and habit all at the same time. He was doubly qualified for the task, since he knew the weaknesses of courts as familiarly as those of the back streets. No wonder Hogarth found fascination in this play!

In the second place, Gay, alone in the literary group with whom he worked and played, could write songs that would sing, and all the Moll Chanters in town loved him and hoped for another soon. *Sweet William's Farewell* and *'Twas when the seas were roaring*, to mention only two, by this time belonged to the nation, and no one could imagine a time when they had not been sung. With this lyrical gift and musicians like Leveridge and Pepusch and Handel in the theatres ready to cooperate, might he not hope to crowd in an English opera that

(*Anecdotes*, p. 159) that he and Swift "now and then gave a correction, or a word or two of advice: but it was wholly of his own writing."

would really hold its own in competition with the Italian? The latter, in spite of all criticism, was winning the loudest plaudits, "the mad triumph of modern infuriated Music," as a critic in the *Gentleman's Magazine* would shortly be calling it. Gay was confident that much of the admiration for the outlandish music was affectation, and, greatly daring, decided to introduce into the body of his comedy songs set to the familiar simple melodies, letting the dialogue stand in place of recitative.[42] In a sense, he was revivalistic, like Charles Wesley letting his audience sing their souls to heaven on the wings of the same tunes that they had helped to bawl out raucously over the ale-benches. He got just the right mixture of the familiar and the strange by this highly original scheme and made an opportunity for himself to write some beautiful lyrics and at the same time satirize the prevailing mode.

In the third place, Gay proposed to make his play somewhat of a theatrical *Craftsman.* Years before, his own first play, *The Wife of Bath,* had been twice postponed and its chances for success wrecked by the popularity of Addison's *Cato.* Now, Gay was not mean-souled enough to grudge another his success, even though that success edged in desperately on his own chances, but he was fully aware of the reasons for that particular success, and proposed to capitalize on them at long last for his own benefit, but in a very different way. *Cato,* he felt, was a wearisome deal of inflated nonsense, versified with mild success, and supported only in public popularity by the political implications which men read between its lines. In his new play, Gay proposed to make it clear enough that Peachum and his gang, his account-books and records, his rewards and punishments, were modeled in small on the government of England, and, since Walpole was maintaining his power by an elaborate system of bribes petty and great, Gay leveled his satire directly at him, and suggested the whole inside working of his political machine under the Newgate allegory. Indeed, Newcastle's correspondence with his henchmen in the boroughs looks even today dan-

[42] French *comédie en vaudevilles* anticipated *The Beggar's Opera* in the use of familiar airs. See Edmond M. Gagey, *Ballad Opera* (New York, 1937), p. 6.

gerously like Peachum's records, and he was Walpole's great boss politician.

This satirical fling was, clearly, a new thing for Gay. Swift had always insisted that the poet must draw attention to himself by slashing satire. "A young Bully begins with Killing his Man: And a young Poet must shew his *Wit* as the other his *Courage*, by Cutting and Slashing, and laying about Him, and banging Mankind."[43] This ordinarily had not been Gay's method. He had at times been both satirical and abusive, but his satire had been usually literary, and if personal, as in *Three Hours after Marriage*, directed against figures who by their notoriety had become, one might almost say, public property. This time he would set his satirical net wider to catch all mankind and particularly the politicians. He would take no chances. If his realistic presentation of low life failed to please, if even the novelty of his songs went flat, he could still rely on this purely adventitious virtue. Surely all those who had Walpole's money in their pockets would clap, for shame, and those who had not, for envy. Yet it must not be thought for a moment that Gay fancied he might stimulate men to join hands and clean up the political garbage plot. No reforming zest is there. The attitude is derisive from start to finish, and even that word *derisive* suggests too hard an edge on the humor. Walpole, being fundamentally good-natured, could applaud, even though he knew the joke was on himself, because it was still a joke and because he must at least appear to like it; and maybe after all there would be no need to punish that man Gay by turning him off—to use the slang of the play—off, that is, from his commissionership.[44]

[43] *A Letter of Advice to a Young Poet; together with a Proposal for the Encouragement of Poetry in this Kingdom* (Dublin, 1721), p. 23.

[44] One finds evidence of the popular attitude everywhere. Note Harleian MSS in the British Museum (7318. f. 59a):

Boileau, *Satire* 9

En vain contre le Cid un Ministre se ligue
Tout Paris pour Chimene a les yeux de Rodrigue.
In vain was ministrial breath
In vain Monarchy Folly
All eyes saw Walpole in Mackheath
And Queensbury in Polly.

This then was the recipe for the new comedy, and it was sufficiently novel. Congreve said it would either take greatly or be damned confoundedly!

Perhaps it was not surprising that when Cibber was presented with the finished opera for production at Drury Lane, he turned it down. He had at that time pretty much the run of the town and could have afforded to be experimental, but though he afterwards recognized the genius of the piece and regretted no doubt his earlier blindness, he could at the moment see little virtue in it and possibly was nervous about the political implications. John Rich at the other house was scarcely more enthusiastic. He had been carrying on a fitful competition with Drury Lane with the aid of machinery rather than good acting. His spectacles dazzled the mob, and his own acting of Harlequin was always popular. One would have expected him to be pleased with novelty, but the surface qualities of the opera were not actually new at all. It was low-life comedy with a curious admixture of tavern melodies. And Rich had no imagination. He was, however, impressed with the aristocratic friends who followed Gay about and who seemed interested in the fate of the play, and he finally consented to try it. For a rehearsal or two its fate remained doubtful. William Cooke writes that the songs were tried at first without musical accompaniment and, since that was unsatisfactory, the music was added at the last moment with the co-operation of Pepusch.

> To this Opera there was no music originally intended to accompany the songs, till Rich, the Manager, suggested it on the second last rehearsal. The junto of wits, who regularly attended, one and all, objected to it; and it was given up till the Duchess of Queensberry [Gay's staunch patroness] accidentally hearing of it, attended herself the next rehearsal, when it was tried, and universally approved of.[45]

If this account is true, Gay owes success to the Duchess of Queensberry on two counts, since Rich had already refused to

[45] *Memoirs of Charles Macklin Comedian with the Dramatic Characters, Manners, Anecdotes, &c. of the Age in which he Lived* (1804), p. 60. This is a strange story and hardly probable.

risk performance without her guarantee of expenses.[46] With this highly satisfactory backing Rich allowed it to take the boards at his old theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields on January 29, 1728.

As when he had attended the first night of *The What d'ye Call It*, and again the first night of *Three Hours after Marriage*, Gay had special reason for trepidation. When a man refuses to cater to expectations and to flatter the fashions of the moment, he takes the risk of having his work disregarded on purely accidental grounds. Gay was a playwright with a genuine flair for farcical absurdity; his audience, strange as it seems to us, were apt to be somewhat bewildered by this. When to the purely ridiculous element in the plot Gay added social and political satire, and innuendoes, amusing but not always by any means obvious, against popular sentimental comedy and the extravagances of Italian opera, he increased the chances of being misunderstood notably. The play had not even started that first night before trouble began over the trifling matter of the introductory music.

The first night the *Beggar's Opera* was played at the Lincoln's-inn-fields theatre, the audience, not being then much acquainted with the nature of operas, expected the usual music before the drawing up of the curtain—finding themselves (as they imagined) likely to be bilked out of their first and second music, they expressed great disapprobation, insomuch that Jack Hall was sent on to apologise for the omission, by explaining that it was a rule to have no music prior to the overture. Jack made his obeisance with a tolerable grace, but being confounded at the general silence which so suddenly ensued on his appearance, blundered out—"Ladies and gentlemen, we—we —beg you'll not call for first and second music, because—because you all know, that there is never any music at all in an opera." This bull put the house in good humour, and the piece proceeded.[47]

The hare with many friends had drawn the sort of audience that one might have expected. It is scarcely correct to say (as Gilfillan, Gay's nineteenth-century biographer, says, and W. H. K. Wright repeats) that strange glances were exchanged be-

[46] Swift, *Letters*, IV, 10.

[47] Oxberry, *Dramatic Biography*, IV, 177; quoted by Schultz, *Gay's Beggar's Opera*, p. 4. To be found also in *The Ladies' Monthly Museum*.

tween Pope's bright eyes and Swift's lowering front, because Swift's lowering front happened to be in Ireland at the time, nor that one might see Addison's quiet, thoughtful physiognomy, as of one retired into some Vision of Mirza, since Addison had been dead for nearly nine years. But many of the clever and the great were there, most of them anxious that the play should succeed. The wits at this time were mostly with the opposition, as Walpole had never courted their flattery, and Gay fortunately had slipped in his piece before *The Dunciad* appeared. Their delight in any embarrassment which the Court or government might suffer was therefore not tempered by the suspicion that Gay might know something about the arts of sinking. At any rate, there seems to have been no organized hostility in the house, and the play had a chance for its life.

Contemporary accounts vary somewhat on just how long it took the audience to make up its mind. Most of them point to Polly's tearfully ridiculous song pretty well through Act I as the critical point.

> Oh, ponder well! be not severe;
> So save a wretched wife!
> For on the rope that hangs my dear
> Depends poor Polly's life.

Others insist that the audience remained largely apathetic during the first act, and that it took Handel's music for the song "Let us take the road" (music appropriated incidentally without compliment[48]) to wake them up to enthusiasm. Pope's account in Spence is illuminating, and should once again be repeated.

> We were all at the first night of it, in great uncertainty of the event; till we were very much encouraged by overhearing the Duke of Argyle, who sat in the next box to us, say, "it will do,—it must do!—I see it in the eyes of them."—This was a good while before

[48] In an article on *The Beggar's Opera* in *London Society*, L, 16 (1886), H. G. Hibbert quotes from the *Somerset House Gazette* a conversation between Handel and Pepusch:

"Pepusch: I hope, sir, you do not include me amongst those who did injustice to your talents.

"Handel: Nod at all, nod at all, God forbid! I am a great admirer of the airs of 'The Beggar's Opera,' andt every professional gendtleman must do his best for to live."

the first act was over, and so gave us ease soon; for the duke, (besides his own good taste) has a more particular knack than anyone now living, in discovering the taste of the public. He was quite right in this, as usual; the good nature of the audience appeared stronger and stronger every act, and ended in a clamour of applause.[49]

Thus the uncertainty which Pope and Swift as well as Gay had earlier felt over the fate of the play was found in the trial to have been quite unnecessary. To argue, as some writers have done, that its success was due almost entirely to the actors whom Rich and Gay had been lucky enough to secure for the parts is utterly beside the point. Gay had the best actors possible—at least the most generally acclaimed—for *The Wife of Bath*, and it failed. The same had been true of *Three Hours after Marriage* and *The Captives*, and neither of them had been at any rate conspicuous successes. On the other hand, Lavinia Fenton and Walker, who acted the leading roles in *The Beggar's Opera*, were virtually unknown to London audiences. Just two years before, *The Daily Post* for February 23, 1726, had announced Miss Fenton's first appearance as follows:

At the Desire of several Persons of Quality. For the Benefit of Mr Huddy. At the New Theatre in the Hay-Market, To-morrow being Thursday the 24th Day of February, will be presented, a Tragedy call'd, *The Orphan: Or, The Unhappy Marriage*. Written by the late Mr. Otway . . . The part of Acasto by Mr. Huddy; Monimia, Mrs. Haughton; the Page, Miss Tollet; and the Part of Serina by a Gentlewoman who never appear'd on any Stage before.

The gentlewoman who never appeared on any stage before was Lavinia Fenton, and she became in a mild way acceptable to London audiences before long in the character of Monimia in *Venice Preserved* and as Cherry in *The Beaux' Stratagem*. Her family antecedents and character fitted her admirably for the part she had to play in Gay's opera. Her father had been a Lieutenant in the Navy, her mother kept a coffeehouse near Charing Cross, and her stepfather had rather too close relations at times with the Old Bailey, so that the supercilious who spoke

[49] Spence, *Anecdotes*, p. 159.

of her as brought up in the Mint were not far from the truth. Her methods with men combined the trace of gentility she inherited from her father with a "killing coyness" not necessarily confined to any social group, a mixture which has been invariably successful. Young's terse sentences in a letter to Tickell in March, 1728, put the point plainly.

> Polly a Wench that acts in the Beggars Opera is the publica Cura of our noble Youth; She plays her Newgate Part well & shews the great Advantage of being born & bred in the Mint; which was really the Case. She, 'tis said, has raised her Price from one Guinea to 100, tho she cannot be a greater whore than she was before, nor, I suppose a younger.[50]

Polly's personal habits and her later history concern us little here. She acted but the one season in *The Beggar's Opera*, captured the admiration of the Duke of Bolton, whom she later married, lived apparently a life of merit and at its close relapsed, as Horace Walpole put it, into her second *Pollyhood* by marrying an Irish surgeon and conferring on him the fortune that might more properly have gone to her sons. She was not a great actress, but her temper and upbringing had fitted her as by command for the part she had to play.[51] Hogarth painted her. She was in youth the combination of a Duchess of Bolton and a Shrimp Girl if ever there was one, and that was exactly what the play required. She had the air of demure innocence with a knowledge of the facts of life—to descend to the modern equivalent of her own dialect—which made her pretty face and graceful enough action irresistible, so that she won sympathetic admiration even while she puzzled the back benches.

[50] R. E. Tickell, *Thomas Tickell and the Eighteenth Century Poets (1685-1740)* p. 144.

[51] See *The Theatre*, New Series, XX, 168-172 (Oct. 1, 1892), for an article on Lavinia Beswick Fenton; also Charles E. Pearce, *Polly Peachum* (1913). Many contemporary references to Polly were the opposite of complimentary, like the following: "*Mother Needham's Elegy Who Died the 31st of September 1730. Containing an Account of Mother Needham's Life and Death, manner of Lying in State, her Funeral, and Epitaph; Also P—y P—m's Lamentation for her old Acquaintance.* . . . If we may credit Fame, she has helped Col. Ch—r to above 100 Country Maidenheads, which she picked up at the Carriers. But tho' there were Thousands whom she deluded, we dont hear that any came to preferment unless P—y P—m who we understand is to be chief Mourner when her Body is removed from the state it now lies."

From the Gabrielle Enthoven Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum

O Polly, speak thy resistless Charm,
Which so bewitches all the Town;
Is it thy *Action*,
Or thy *Complexion*,
Which makes sighing Crowds thy own?[52]

Gay was equally fortunate in his Macheath. The part was given first to Quin, who had little enthusiasm for it and finally persuaded Gay to put it in the hands of Tom Walker, a young man who had started from very humble beginnings and had risen to rather commonplace parts in comedy.

To act *Macheath* more Merit must you bring,
Than thrill a Ballad, and with Quaver sing;
A manly Gesture and a sprightly Air
Must with the proper Dignity appear;
The gay mock Heroe must our Passions move,
By Joy, by Courage, in Distress, and Love.
Some Parts 'tis Danger to attempt at all,
When late we've seen a great Original . . .
Hence, *Walker*, though we many *Macheaths* view,
The standard Excellence remains in you.[53]

William Oldys says that Walker played the part of Lorenzo in *The Merchant of Venice* as early as 1716,[54] but the earliest notice I find of him is in *The Weekly Journal or Saturday's Post* for September 15, 1722:

We hear, that the Dramatick Entertainment of Valentine and Orson, which Mr. Walker has prepared for the Diversion of the Town, during the Time of Southwark Fair, meets with universal Applause; great Numbers of People daily flocking to see it. This is the first Undertaking of his in this Nature.

Like Polly, then, he had seen at close quarters the sort of characters that Gay portrayed, and although he had little training

[52] *A Letter to Polly.* To one of Her Own Tunes (1728). For date, see *The Monthly Chronicle*, April, 1728, p. 105.

[53] "An Essay on the Theatres: Or, the Art of Acting," printed for the first time in the *Harleian Miscellany*, V, 548 (1745).

[54] That is, if Oldys was, as R. W. Lowe says, the author of *The History of the English Stage, from the Restauration to the Present Time* (1741), p. 161. This has Betterton's name on the title page, but could scarcely have been his.

in the conventions of acting and no musical experience, he understood the art of catching the attention of the shiftless mob with the casual liveliness of his style. He presented the character with the necessary gaiety and swagger; his youth and good looks were an enormous advantage, and as a handsome gentleman in misfortune he brought tears to the ladies' eyes just as many a romantic-looking Tyburn hero was wont to do at the monthly executions.

Hippesley was the original Peachum, an actor who seems to have been known frequently in the part of Antonio in *Venice Preserved* and who continued doing the Nicky-Nacky scenes until they were finally cut to please a more refined taste. His impersonation of Peachum must have been greatly aided by a grotesque distortion of his face, caused by an accidental burn. He had been doing many of Penkethman's parts since the latter's death in 1725.[55]

The other actors were well enough known but not distinguished, more accustomed certainly to the moderate run of six or eight nights than to the blaze of glory that greeted their appearance that first memorable night and continued to hang over them for sixty-two performances the first season. They proved to be highly competent for the task in hand, but they did not make the play by any means. Its later history in the theatre proves that. Handled by successive series of actors, staged by children sometimes, with men in women's parts and women in the men's parts, in all kinds of freak arrangements, it has rarely failed to please. Nor was its original success based on party support. The royal family, Walpole himself, lords and ladies of every degree thronged to see it, but the prolonged run meant the approbation of the masses of people in pit and gallery, the people who refused to allow any substitutions on those nights when they were expecting *The Beggar's Opera*.

The reasons for their esteem, if they had ever bothered to formulate them, would have been in the first place the uproarious fun of the piece. The dialogue had no traces of the

[55] See H. G. Hibbert's article on *The Beggar's Opera, London Society*, L, 17 (1886).

set-speech in it—the speeches invariably fitted the mouths of the actors—and the wit, while not too often subtle and never conceited, had sparkle and a tinge of the paradoxical about it. It was the kind of wit that delights by upsetting in surprising fashion the usually accepted notions about living. The cursed playbooks have been Polly's ruin; she actually thinks that she will live upon the industry of her husband. If the silly girl had but married Macheath for his money, looking forward to having him promptly peached and settling down into the comfortable estate of widowhood, papa and mamma Peachum could have understood her action. As it is, Peachum feels slightly aggrieved that Polly will not handle the task of taking off her newly acquired husband; he can hardly find it in his heart to have a hand in the death of so great a man. Macheath among the doxies, Macheath distractedly singing the frolicsome ditty "How happy could I be with either, Were t'other dear charmer away," while Lucy and Polly besiege him, Macheath caught once more, this time in bed with Mrs. Coaxer, is a sordid enough picture, but no one ever dreams that Macheath is sordid. He is out of reach of ordinary moral judgments well up on the high mountains of hilarity. Even in the condemned hold and headed for the gallows, Macheath fails to become a melancholy object. We know that rhyme and reason will not keep him there and that all our tears will be tears of laughter. Reprieve is inevitable long before the beggar begins to talk about it. Topsy-turvydom is complete; if Macheath had proved with child and sent his wenches forth to fight, the farce could scarcely have been more absurd. There is plenty of obvious fun for the obvious-minded, and occasional subtleties for the precocious and the sophisticates to crow over.

But the fun was directed, the madness had method, and this method depended largely on Gay's original notion of giving to thieves and whores in burlesque the manners of fine lords and ladies. Gay effected a democratization of caste without its destruction. Absolved from their ordinary preoccupations by the power of humor, men saw the aristocrats and commoners of Newgate taking the pattern of their vanities from St. James's.

It was refreshing to think that while willing to tolerate distinctions, people could recognize human nature as essentially the same wherever noted. And this quality in the play was effective in moving the masses because it was based on a quiet sincerity. It was not preached; it was simply allowed to emerge, and it was a fresh notion to these playgoers, an idea which many perhaps had been struggling to express and now recognized instinctively as true.

Again, the play reflected the admiring and almost fatalistic attitude of the common man towards success. Some are born with extra aces in hand, and the crowd watches the shrewd gamesters at play and is always willing to pay for the good show; but occasionally they wish to emphasize that they know what is going on, even though they care little about reformation. The joke must be turned somehow, and in *The Beggar's Opera* the joke is turned on gamesters and lawyers alike, on politicians and courtiers, and those that somehow manage to get the good things of life at the expense of society. We all know of course that Peachum is useful to us, and if he good-naturedly takes a box, and claps loudest at the lines that ridicule his election briberies or his moral slips, we are happy to receive him into forgiveness.[56] Let peculation thrive! The common man disdains overemphasis on either honesty or continence. He knows himself too well.

Again, most people in the theatre that night would be glad to find English music holding its own against these foreign

[56] See *Biographia Dramatica*, II, 55, for the anecdote about Walpole's behavior at a performance of *The Beggar's Opera:* "Sir Robert Walpole was frequently the subject of Mr. Gay's satire. The minister, however, was not deterred from attending the performance of the poet's *Beggar's Opera*. Being in the stage boxes at its first representation, a most universal encore attended the following air of Lockit, and all eyes were directed on the minister at the instant of its being repeated:

When you censure the age,
Be cautious and sage,
Lest the courtiers offended should be:
If you mention *vice* or *bribe*,
'Tis so pat to all the tribe,
That each cries, *That was levell'd at me!*

Sir Robert, observing the pointed manner in which the audience applied the last line to him, parried the thrust by encoring it with his single voice; and thus not only blunted the poetical shaft, but gained a general huzza from the audience."

fa-la-las. Pepusch was overshadowed in his own time as well as later by Handel's greatness, but he was a competent musician; his overture and his arrangements of the old English melodies were pleasing, and, combined with the magic of poetry, awoke emotions near the pit of every man's stomach. Here was no affected enthusiasm.

> If the heart of a man is deprest with cares,
> The mist is dispell'd when a woman appears;
> Like the notes of a fiddle, she sweetly, sweetly
> Raises the spirits, and charms our ears.
>
> Roses and lillies her cheeks disclose,
> But her ripe lips are more sweet than those.
> Press her,
> Caress her,
> With blisses,
> Her kisses
>
> Dissolve us in pleasure, and soft repose.

Following the irresponsible William Cooke, later critics have repeated the notion that many of the songs were composed by Gay's friends.[57] Pope gets one, Swift another, Lord Chesterfield another, and even Sir Charles Hanbury Williams (at that time but twenty years old and unknown to Gay) and the inarticulate Fortescue are credited with one apiece, all on the authority of gossip supposed to have originated with the Dowager Lady Townshend. Now Dolly Walpole would have known nothing about the composition of *The Beggar's Opera* at first hand, and if she ever did hazard guesses of this sort she was merely echoing the current gossip to which Pope refers in Spence's *Anecdotes* when he emphatically denies such cooperation. Gay was not frequently in Pope's company during that November and December,[58] and it is worth noting that one of the songs which Henry Angelo,[59] elaborating Cooke's notion, ascribes to Pope contains exactly the same idea which

[57] William Cooke, *Memoirs of Macklin* (1804), p. 60. These memoirs were published serially in the *European Magazine*, 1799 and 1800. See *The Mirror*, XI, 64 (Jan. 26, 1828).

[58] Swift, *Letters*, IV, 3.

[59] Henry Angelo, *Reminiscences* (1828), I, 25-26.

Gay had himself used in a letter to Mrs. Howard from Tunbridge Wells in August, 1723.

> Since laws were made for ev'ry degree,
> To curb vice in others, as well as me,
> I wonder we han't better company
> Upon *Tyburn* tree!

Gay had written: "I cannot indeed wonder that the talents requisite for a great statesman are so scarce in the world, since so many of those who possess them are every month cut off in the prime of their age at the Old Bailey."[60] These were the witticisms current in Gay's set, and he was quite as apt to use them as any of the others. There is no ground for distributing his songs thus widely, except current gossip; this particular kind of gossip was inevitable, however, considering the close association of this group of writers in the public mind. Many felt, too, like Broome in the following letter to Fenton, that Pope was the fountain of all satire, and could not believe Gay capable of it.

> I have seen Mr Gay's mock opera. Johnny is a goodnatured inoffensive man. I doubt not, therefore, but those lines against courts and ministers are drawn, at least aggravated, by Mr. Pope, who delights to paint every man in the worst colours. He wounds from behind Gay, and like Teucer in Homer, puts Gay in the front of the battle, and shoots his arrows lurking under the shield of Ajax.[61]

This passage follows one in which Broome expressed the utmost exasperation with Pope, and likened him to a hedge-hog that lies snug and warm and sets his bristles out against all mankind. His suggestion about Pope's part in *The Beggar's Opera* was a mere guess, with little foundation except Broome's own feeling that all satire must exude from one person, and one only.

Gay's heart was in these songs; they were the best that he had to give, and the universal recognition of their beauty must have given him great pleasure, even though he announced as

[60] Countess of Suffolk, *Letters*, I, 118.
[61] Pope, *Works*, VIII, 147.

his motto for the opera, *Nos haec novimus esse nihil.* His own attitude towards the Italian opera is reflected in an earlier letter he wrote to Swift, February 3, 1723:

> As for the reigning amusement of the town, it is entirely music; real fiddles, bass-viols, and hautboys, not poetical harps, lyres, and reeds. There is nobody allowed to say, "I sing," but an eunuch, or an Italian woman. Everybody is grown now as great a judge of music, as they were in your time of poetry, and folks, that could not distinguish one tune from another, now daily dispute about the different styles of Handel, Bononcini, and Attilio. People have now forgot Homer, and Virgil, and Caesar, or at least, they have lost their ranks; for, in London and Westminster, in all polite conversations, Senesino is daily voted to be the greatest man that ever lived.[62]

As in his attitude towards the inequalities and injustices of social arrangements, so in this matter of music, Gay—though familiar with the ways of the great and their curious aestheticisms—was at heart with the common man, and in this opera at least knew how to win his confidence.

Once again, on the often debated but silly question of the morals of *The Beggar's Opera,* Gay was unequivocally sympathetic. The play has no morals! There is, it is true, honor among thieves, and an utterly charming affectation of polite manners, but to suggest, as Gibbon does, that the production of *The Beggar's Opera* brought about a refinement in the manners of actual thieves "making them less ferocious, more polite, in fact, more like gentlemen,"[63] is as impertinent as to imagine, with Justice Fielding,[64] that every revival of the play increased

[62] Swift, *Letters,* III, 154.

[63] *Old England: or, The Constitutional Journal,* No. II, p. 9 (Feb. 12, 1743): "The Arch *Mackheath,* who so very lately escap'd, was a great Proficient in the genteel Way of doing his Business; he never committed an Exploit in the way of his Profession, that he did not give a great many Reasons for doing it, and made a great many Apologies for the *Necessities which drove him to follow that way of Life:* But those who have succeeded him in robbing the Publick have no other Language, when one puts in a Word, than *D—n your Blood, we will have your Money; what signifies talking?* This to be sure is such a Strain of Arrogance, that, I dare say, if any of those Fellows are caught they will certainly *Swing.*"

[64] William Augustus Miles, *A Letter to Sir John Fielding, Knt. Occasioned by His extraordinary Request to Mr. Garrick for the Suppression of the Beggar's Opera* (1773); *Gentleman's Magazine,* XLIII, 463 (Sept., 1773); *The Letters and Journals*

the crop of pickpockets in Newgate. The King's chaplain, Dr. Herring, was right from his point of view in preaching against the insidious looseness of *The Beggar's Opera*.[65] It is insidiously loose in the sense in which the Dr. Herrings of this world use those terms, but that, I fear, was another reason for its popularity. "Damn braces, bless relaxes," as Blake puts it in one of his proverbs of Hell, and mankind has always found hell more entertaining than heaven. The play has at least this virtue, that it throws light on the actualities of life and exalts courage, good faith, and comradeship. Swift took its "message" with altogether too much seriousness in his article in *The Intelligencer*, and probably misinterpreted Gay's own feelings when he wrote to Charles Wogan, August 2, 1732:

> . . . but I find at present your genius runs wholly into the grave and sublime, and therefore I find you less indulgent to my way by your dislike of the Beggar's Opera, in the persons particularly of Polly Peachum and Macheath, whereas we think it a very severe satire upon the most pernicious villainies of mankind. And so you are in danger of quarrelling with the sentiments of Mr. Pope, Mr. Gay the author, Dr. Arbuthnot, myself, Dr. Young, and all the brethren whom we own.[66]

Eliza Haywood gets perhaps as close to the heart of that matter as any of Gay's contemporaries. In No. 9 of *The Parrot* (1746), she discusses the moral of *The Beggar's Opera*.

> The late witty and ingenious Mr. *Gay*, in his most diverting *Dramatic* Entertainment, intitled, *The Beggar's Opera*, tells us, I very well remember,

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of Lady Mary Coke (Edinburgh, 1889-1896), IV, 136-137. Also *Annual Register*, XVI, 132 (Sept. 15, 1773).

[65] *Seven Sermons on Public Occasions*. By the Most Reverend Dr. Thomas Herring, Late Lord Archbishop of Canterbury. Now first collected. With a Preface (1763). William Duncomb wrote the preface and in it supported Herring's attitude: "He was not singular in this Opinion; and Experience afterwards confirmed the Truth of his Observations, since several Thieves and Street-robbers confessed in *Newgate*, that they raised their Courage at the Playhouse, by the Songs of their Hero *Macheath*, before they sallied forth on their desperate nocturnal Exploits."

[66] Swift, *Letters*, IV, 330. See also *Theatrical Correspondence in Death. An Epistle from Mrs. Oldfield, in the Shades, To Mrs. Br—ceg—dle, upon Earth: containing, A Dialogue between the Most Eminent Players in the Shades, upon The Late Stage Desertion* (1743).

Your little Villains must submit to Fate,
That great Ones may enjoy the World in State.

I should be extremely sorry indeed to be assured that this Piece of Satire were as *just* as it is *severe;* but till I am so, will not give myself the Mortification of thinking it any more than the Over flowings of a momentary Spleen;—a short Sally of luxuriant Fancy, which the Author himself, who was doubtless a Man of great Good-nature, did not enough consider to correct.—Whoever, notwithstanding, examines with any Attention the whole Piece, will find that there is a constant Strain runs through it, of putting the whole Species pretty much upon a Level in this Particular.

Hazlitt has no need to splurge about like Mrs. Haywood, nor has he her timidity. He says the play demonstrates the vulgarity of vice. That is the important thing to notice, not whether Macheath marries Lucy (who longs to be made an honest woman) and thus himself becomes a "Man of Honour, and a President worthy of future Imitation,"[67] nor even whether he is sent to the hulks for three years to think over his sins, as in the Covent Garden revival of 1777.[68]

In any case, people went to see *The Beggar's Opera* not for its satire nor for its moral, if it had one, but for amusement, and the Lincoln's Inn Fields house was not apt to be thronged with highwaymen or even pickpockets looking for encouragement to vice or for sermons against it. The theatre contributes

[67] *The Country Bard; or, the Modern Courtiers* (1739), p. 5 n.

[68] *The History of the Theatres of London: containing an Annual Register of all the New and Revived Tragedies, Comedies, Operas, Farces, Pantomimes, &c. that have been performed at the Theatres-Royal in London, From the Year 1771 to 1795. With Occasional Notes and Anecdotes* (1796), pp. 70-71: "The managers of both houses seemed more industrious this season in bringing out new performers than pieces. The Beggar's Opera was performed at each theatre in the form of a *moral* tale, although the indecent scenes remained. This alteration was suggested by Mr. *Garrick,* who thereby imagined to do away all prejudices against the piece; accordingly the poet, and manager in their stage-closet conversation, agreed to do poetical justice (as they called it) and *Macheath* was sentenced to heave ballast upon the river for three years; but the absurdity of this conclusion struck every impartial person, who considered that *Gay* meant this piece as a burlesque upon the Italian Opera, independent of the satire that everywhere prevails through it; therefore this alteration could be deemed no other than a burlesque upon a burlesque. To complete the *moral* turn of the now-spoiled opera, a well painted scene representing Woolwich, and the Justicia hulk, was introduced. The managers however perceiving the absurdity of their alterations, began to reduce them, so that by degrees, the opera was restored to its primitive state."

its share no doubt to the development of all sides of human nature, just as—to grow irreverent—St. Paul's Cathedral had been doing until an energetic Bishop cleared the aisles.

The same Objection may be made to every public Place; and St *Paul's* Church was particularly liable to it before the present Bishop of *London,* thro his great and commendable Zeal, routed the idle People from the Isles thereof; yet I should have grieved if that glorious Structure, on which the Immortality of *Wren* depends, had been levelled with the Ground, because some vagrant Nymphs presumed to pitch their Toils there.[69]

Gay must have been surprised by all this talk about the immorality of the play.[70] For him the moral tone was inherent in the subject and in the elaboration of his central notion. The talk did not hurt; it helped him, and the opera sailed on its way to success blown in part by homiletic blasts that were meant to overwhelm it.

He got £693 13*s.* 6*d.* from the production, along with ninety guineas more from Tonson and Watts for the copyright of *The Beggar's Opera* and *The Fables.*[71] The highest receipts for any single night were for the second benefit (he had four), £189 11*s.* The performances were interrupted only for actors' benefits, at which the manager generally insisted on using stock plays, sometimes to the annoyance of both actors and public.[72] Seats were hard to secure, and even so high a personage as the second Earl of Oxford had to make advance arrangements. He

[69] [Thomas Cooke,] *Considerations on the Stage, and on the Advantages Which arise to a Nation From the Encouragement of Arts* (1731), p. 70.

[70] *A View of the Town: or, Memoirs of London* (2d ed., 1731), p. 48: "No, Sir, the Town certainly lost its Taste first, and the Actors, to get Bread, were forced to comply; since which, *Harlequins* and *Mackheaths* have been their Darlings: and if one were to judge of Folks Morals by the Pieces they applaud, one would be apt to think, both a modern Poet, and his Audience, had deserved the Gallows. But that I intend never to border upon Politics, I could be very serious in my Remarks on the Consequences that have attended them. Thieving and the Highway are Edged-Tools to play with, and they ought by no means to be set in a gay or ridiculous Light to the Mob."

[71] *Notes and Queries,* 1st Series, I, 178-179 (Jan. 19, 1850); see also 8th Series, VII, 501 (June 29, 1895). These figures are taken "from the original Account-book of the manager, C. M. Rich."

[72] *The Craftsman,* May 4, 1728: "The Beggar's Opera is to be performed this evening for the benefit of pretty Polly; when it is hoped all lovers of British music and beauty will do her the honour of their appearance."

had been exerting himself on Gay's behalf, as one may judge from the following letter Gay wrote to him on February 12, 1728.

I was last night to pay my duty to your Lordship, and to thank you for interesting yourself in so kind a manner in my behalf. I had heard before that the King and Queen were to be present at "Julius Caesar" on Friday, so that my intention was to acquaint your Lordship that I had fixed on Thursday. As to the boxes on that day, I fear by what I have heard about the town they are taken up already, but if your Lordship would be so good as to send a servant to the boxkeeper, I hope I shall have the honour of Lady Oxford's presence in the very box she chooses, for I know Mr. Rich would upon all occasions be very glad to oblige your Lordship.[73]

Gay and his friends were exuberant. His own state of mind can be judged by Pope's phrases in a letter he wrote to Swift at this time (February 15, 1728):

The only courtiers I know, or have the honour to call my friends, are John Gay and Mr Bowry; the former is at present so employed in the elevated airs of his opera, and the latter in the exaltation of his high dignity, that of her Majesty's waterman, that I can scarce obtain a categorical answer from either to anything I say to them. But the opera succeeds extremely, to yours and my extreme satisfaction, of which he promises this post to give you a full account.[74]

Pope's waterman, Bowry, must have been allowed to do some temporary service for the queen, and his excitement over the great honor had upset Pope's retired leisure as much as Gay's extravagant delight in the success of his play. Mrs. Pilkington would have us believe that Pope's happiness over his friend's good fortune was well diluted with petty jealousy. She claims that Dean Swift showed her letters from Pope that contained satirical and envious remarks on the success of the opera, with reflections on both Gay and the Queensberrys. When she expressed surprise, the Dean explained that "authors are as jealous of their prerogative as Kings, and can no more bear a rival in

[73] Historical Manuscripts Commission, *MSS of the Marquis of Bath* (1904), I, 252.
[74] Swift, *Letters*, IV, 9.

the empire of wit than a monarch could in his dominions." We should add here the comment that Mrs. Pilkington's references to Pope are invariably uncomplimentary and reflect perhaps her chagrin over his lack of interest in her London career; but the point about the Queensberrys is curiously supported by Pope's later attitude towards the Duchess, and Mrs. Pilkington may have seen some peevish letter which in retrospect she proceeded to elaborate to Pope's discredit. There is no reason to doubt the essential good fellowship of these three musketeers. Swift had let off one blast against the world and its follies in *Gulliver's Travels*, Gay followed with *The Beggar's Opera*, and Pope waited only until May before publishing *The Dunciad*.

Arbuthnot had nothing at the moment to offer except a book on his antiquarian hobby, and he freely praised all three, Gay's effort not least. Swift wrote (March 28, 1728):

> The Beggar's Opera has knocked down Gulliver; I hope to see Pope's Dulness knock down the Beggar's Opera, but not till it has fully done its job. They have not been told how easy a thing it is to get eight hundred pounds by two or three months' writing. If you were an alderman you could never fail of writing two or three such trifles every year. To expose vice, and to make people laugh with innocence, does more public service than all the Ministers of State from Adam to Walpole, and so adieu.[75]

Gay's friends on *The Craftsman*[76] gave him plenty of publicity, and for their own purposes overemphasized the political implications of the play, especially the satire on Walpole and Townshend. *The Daily Journal* for Thursday, February 1, 1728, was ready to echo popular approval.

> On Monday was represented for the first Time, at the Theatre Royal in Lincoln's Inn Fields, Mr. Gay's new English Opera, written in a Manner wholly new, and very entertaining, there being introduced, instead of Italian Airs, above 60 of the most celebrated old English and Scotch Tunes. There was present then, as well as last Night, a prodigious Concourse of Nobility and Gentry, and no Theatrical Performance for these many Years has met with so much Applause.

[75] *Ibid.*, IV, 23.

[76] See numbers for Feb. 17, April 13, June 1, June 29, Aug. 31, Dec. 28.

The newssheets of the time are filled with references; verses were written in praise of the author and of Polly. Gay was a hero with the Westminster boys and the Cambridge young gentlemen.

> Yet for unstudied humour *Gay* shall please,
> Who on the barren'st subject writes with ease.
> The theatre his just applauses rings,
> When sense with manly voice his *Mackheath* sings.
> Then *Senesino* warbles but in vain
> And soft *Cutzona* yields to *Polly's* strain.
> His *art of walking* wrote in hum'rous verse
> Whilst to themselves the lawyers clerks rehearse
> Pleas'd, they no longer curse the dirty street,
> Forget their weary steps, and aching feet.[77]

Songs from the opera were engraved on screens and fans and playing-cards. Noblemen, like the Duke of Wharton and his set, took to calling one another by the names of the rogues in the play.[78] *A Key to The Beggar's Opera* was published in *The Craftsman*, February 17, 1728. Dissections[79] and sad examples[80] of the influence of the opera, and *Memoirs of the life and manners of Captain Macheath*[81] all appeared in rapid succession. *A Trip through London, containing observations on men and things . . . by Jack G[a]y, Tom W[a]lk[e]r, and Moll Fent[o]n*, ran apparently into seven editions that first year. The opera made its way down to Smithfield, and found itself quite at home there.

> Some distance mounted on a Stage appear
> The well-known *Peachum*, *Lockitt*, and *Mackheath*.
> Here Nature, more than Art, has fram'd the Men
> Really to personate the Characters.
> Here *Scribler* spoke, Behold (my Friends) these Men
> Will not deceive your Senses, you may read

[77] "The Modern Poets, In allusion to Horace, Sat. x. Book I. By a young Gentleman of Cambridge," *Gentleman's Magazine*, I, 493 (1731).

[78] *An Useful and Entertaining Collection of Letters upon Various Subjects* (1745), pp. 29-31.

[79] *A Satyrical Poem; or, The Beggar's Opera dissected.*

[80] *Thievery-a-la-mode, or, The fatal encouragement* (1728).

[81] Published May 14, 1728, according to *The Monthly Chronicle*, No. 49, p. 133. Noticed in *The Craftsman* for May 18, 1728.

Rogue, Knave and Robber on their Faces plain;
For in the Entertainments of the Stage,
We learn they act the best who're fram'd by Nature.[82]

The hostile and the supercilious paid their tribute by implication along with the enthusiasts. The Motte *Miscellanies* had been published in part the preceding year; *The Dunciad* itself appeared May 28, and the host of enemies whom these publications stirred to action were not always careful to delimit their attacks, so that Gay often suffered along with Pope and Swift. James Ralph, for example, who paid *The Beggar's Opera* a high compliment in *The Case of Authors by Profession,*[83] is insulting to Gay and to opera alike when he thinks of them as associated with the author of *The Dunciad.* In *Sawney* Ralph reviews Pope's career, tells of his exasperation over Theobald's review of his Shakespeare, and how that led to the writing of *The Dunciad.*

Then sends in Haste,
For *Shameless* to his Aid, and *Hounslow,* He
Who writ the *Play* of *Thieves,* a finish'd Piece!
Much fam'd for Gallantry, for Vertue, Wit,
And all the Comick Art: Confess'd so good,
So perfect, that, thro' all Degrees of Life,
The Humour ran to own it's high Desert,
And struggle which should praise it most: while He,
The Author, tho' a trifling empty Fop
Who only father'd Sawney's third rate Wit,
So humble grew as to conceal his Name,
And, in his *Motto,* damn the whole Design.[84]

"Shameless" is Swift, and he and Gay are called "Sawney's Squires, his Friends, His Intimates, the Assistants of his Verse, And Trumpets of his Praise." So Ralph damns Gay for accepting help from Pope, and Pope for accepting help from Gay.

The Dunciad brought old John Dennis into action also, and in his *Remarks upon Several Passages in the Preliminaries to the Dunciad* (1729) he printed a letter from Giles Jacob which attacks Gay and Pope as co-workers in iniquity.

[82] *Bartholomew-Fair: or, A Ramble to Smithfield* (1728).
[83] (1758), p. 26.
[84] James Ralph, *Sawney. An Heroic Poem* (1728), pp. 19-20.

I do not pretend to say how long Mr. *Pope* was writing of his *Dunciad;* but his great Malice against me, has been ten Years hatching and laying up, so as not to be brought to Light till the *Beggars Opera,* by Mr. *Gay* and Company was acted in the Theatre; which low and licentious dramatical Piece, design'd for the Encouragement of Gentlemen on the Highway, and their female Associates, in *Drury-Lane,* by its extraordinary Novelty, happening to strike the giddy Humour of the Town, has introduc'd a new Species of the vilest Farce, and turn'd the Heads of both *Pope* and *Gay* (who clubb'd their Wit in that Performance) since which, their Pride is become intolerable to all Men of common Sense. But these great poetical Champions in the Cause of *Newgate,* will be justly pourtraited in a Supplement to my Account of them in *The Lives of the Poets.*[85]

Giles Jacob and Curll, Bramston and many others were soon trying to defend themselves from the charge of dullness by exhibiting that quality most egregiously; in many of their pamphlets Gay's name appears, and, although some of the dunces attempt good-naturedly to separate Gay from the bad company he keeps, most of them take no such trouble.[86] That some of the animus was political is shown by the occasional association of his name with Pulteney's or with Bolingbroke's. *The Weekly Journal: or, the British Gazetteer* for April 27, 1728, published a poem satirizing Swift along with Pulteney, Pope, Gay, and Nicholas Amhurst, the editor of *The Craftsman.*

> These four in strict Alliance
> Most bravely bid Defiance

[85] P. 48.

[86] [Giles Jacob,] *The Mirrour: or, Letters Satyrical, Panegyrical, Serious and Humorous, on the Present Times . . . To which is added A legal Conviction of Mr. Alexander Pope of Dulness and Scandal, in the high Court of Parnassus* (1733), p. 14; *Woman's Revenge: or, A Match in Newgate* (1728). This play by Christopher Bullock was first published in 1715, and had been revived in 1725. This edition of 1728 was dedicated "To pretty Miss Polly Peachum. . . . The *Beggars Opera,* Mr. *Gay* stole from Mr. *Bullock,* who only Borrowed it of Mr. *Marston;* and the Law says, The Receiver is as bad as the Thief"; William Egerton, *Faithful Memoirs of . . . Mrs. Anne Oldfield,* p. 149: "The *Italian* Opera, the *Beggar's* Opera, and other such like Farcical, and gewgau Pantomime Entertainments, which are of late introduced, can leave no Trace behind them that can be of Service beyond the present Moment. To Sing and to Dance, are Accomplishments very few have any thoughts of practising; but to speak Justly and move Gracefully, is what every one thinks they do, or wish they did"; *A Satyr on the Times And Some of the Modern Plays, viz.— Beggar's Opera, etc.* By John Lloyd, author of *The Art of Politicks* (1730), p. 11.

To Virtue, Sense and Science,
And who but needs must praise 'em!

Some of the hostile criticism is at least bright enough to recognize in part the secret of the opera's success. Even Ralph admitted that the rags of poetry and scraps of music, as he called them, were joined most naturally. He understood the genesis of Gay's idea also.

The *Beggar's Opera*, by robbing the Performers at *Pye-corner*, *Fleet-ditch*, *Moor-fields* (and other Stations of this Metropolis, famed for travelling Sounds) of their undoubted Properties, has reinstated them in Wealth and Grandeur; and what shock'd most Ears, and set most Teeth on edge, at turning the Corner of a Street, for half a Moment; when thrown into a regular Entertainment, charms for Hours.[87]

One curious pamphlet, called *An Essay against Too much Reading* (1728), urges the sprightly youths whose minds have not yet been corrupted by stupid history to use their wit to revive the drooping age.

Now it is demonstrated how much the Age is in want of some Wit upon the Stage, when that low grovelling Hodge-podge, call'd the *Beggar's Opera*, a Bundle or Collection of old Ballads that have been cry'd about the Streets fifty Years ago, and which make up half the Play, has been so well received. One would think, they design'd to set up his Statue in Brass, for giving them the High Goust of the Age. The Gentleman that writ it, would have given it to anybody, not believing the World was so starv'd for want of Wit. You see how they crouded about after it; being quite glutted with *Rich's Jack-Pudding* Nonsense of Entertainments, and the *Old-House*, they must see old Plays over again, or none, which tires, altho' good. I only tell you this, to shew what a Prospect of Encouragement there is for Industry in Writing. You that are not ruin'd or frighten'd by Reading, now is the Time, or never, to rouze up, and summon all your Wits together.[88]

The Beggar's Opera began its first Dublin run about the

[87] *The Touchstone: or Historical, Critical, Political, Philosophical, and Theological Essays On the reigning Diversions of the Town* (1728), p. 16. This work was reissued in 1731 as *The Taste of the Town: or, a Guide to All Publick Diversions.*

[88] P. 15.

middle of March, 1728.[89] Swift writes on May 10, 1728, that the opera had been acted there twenty times and that Lord Carteret had gone to see it several times and was delighted in spite of the obvious satire on his friend Walpole.[90] Indeed, Swift was early keen to know whether Walpole took the satire as an affront, and in one letter prayed God that he might. Gay went to Bath about May 1 that year and was before long directing a production of his opera there. *Brice's Weekly Journal*, July 28, 1728, gives the following account of these activities:

> We hear from Bath, that Mr. Gay, Author of the celebrated "Beggar's Opera," has been there these two months drinking the waters for his Health, During which Time he has taken more than ordinary Pains with the Comedians of that City, in instructing them in the Performance of his said Opera, which has so good an Effect that they have not only gain'd a great deal of Money by it, but universal Applause, insomuch that they play'd it all Last Season at Bath, and still continue playing it in Bristol at their Great Booth in Bridewell Lane near the corner of St. James's Churchyard; and have been sent for by the Quality to perform it at their Houses, and to the Long Room near the Hot-well several Times. They intend to continue playing the same, during the Time of St. James's Fair every Evening, having the famous Mr. Hippisley The Original Performer of Peachum in Lincoln's Inn Fields added to their company.

Gay himself says merely in a letter to Swift that the play had been acted, that "our" Polly had got no fame, but that the actors had got money.

The most exotic tale of the fortunes of *The Beggar's Opera* out of London was printed in Chetwood's *General History of the Stage* (1749) and concerned the adventures of a company of comedians in Jamaica who continued acting the play there until by the combined ravages of yellow fever and rum-punch they were reduced to one old man, a boy, and a woman, and not all the recruited amateurs from the plantations could keep the diversion going any longer. Even the shattered remains of

[89] W. J. Lawrence, "*The Beggar's Opera* in Dublin," *Notes and Queries*, 10th Series, III, 364 (May 13, 1905). L. R. M. Strachan, "*The Beggar's Opera* in Dublin," *ibid.*, 10th Series, IV, 91 (July 29, 1905); this second article is with special reference to Swift's correspondence. [90] Swift, *Letters*, IV, 12, 29.

the company with two thousand pistoles in pocket were cast away by a storm on the journey to Carolina.

When one ventures into the anecdotal literature that besets *The Beggar's Opera,* all kinds of amusing stories turn up. Henry Fielding had his fun with the quarrel between Kitty Clive and Mrs. Cibber over who should act Polly.[91] Mrs. Charke, the notorious, herself came to the rescue of Richard Elrington and his strollers at Tiverton, just at the critical moment when one of his leading ladies was dead drunk in bed and Mrs. Elrington had been forced artfully to contrive to double the parts of Polly and Lucy.[92] Sensitive ladies started laughing when Mr. Bannister made his appearance as Polly and, after several days of continued hysterics, expired as martyrs to the comic spirit.[93] A Negro woman once acted the part of Polly in Lancashire and afterwards applied to Foote for a job in the same capacity without success.[94] One of the best of all these stories is Boswell's account of Johnson's application of a line from *The Beggar's Opera* to a pretty domestic scene in his own house.

> Some time after this, upon his making a remark which escaped my attention, Mrs. Williams and Mrs. Hall were both together striving to answer him. He grew angry, and called out loudly, 'Nay, when you both speak at once, it is intolerable.' But checking himself, and softening, he said, 'This one may say, though you *are* ladies.' Then he brightened into gay humour, and addressed them in the words of one of the songs in *The Beggar's Opera:*—'But two at a time there's no mortal can bear.' 'What, Sir, (said I,) are you going to turn Captain Mackheath?' There was something as pleasantly ludicrous in this scene as can be imagined. The contrast between Macheath, Polly, and Lucy—and Dr. Samuel Johnson, blind, peevish Mrs. Williams, and lean, lank, preaching Mrs. Hall, was exquisite.[95]

Dr. Johnson liked the opera for its novelty and general spirit of gaiety and humor.[96] Burke thought it had no merit.

[91] [Henry Fielding,] *The Historical Register, For the Year 1736.* As it is Acted at the New Theatre In the Hay-Market (1741), p. 22.

[92] *Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Charlotte Charke* (1755), p. 198.

[93] *Gentleman's Magazine,* LII, 207 (April, 1782).

[94] John Jackson, *The History of the Scottish Stage* (Edinburgh, 1793), p. 350.

[95] Boswell, *Johnson,* ed. Birkbeck Hill, IV, 95. [96] *Ibid.,* III, 321.

The Noted *HANSON* and *YEATES*, from *London*,

IS come to this Place, and is at the *gill hall* where will be perform'd,

The Beggar's OPERA.

WHerein is shewn the vile Practices of *Peachum* and his Wife, and the out o' the way management of their Crew: The Pleasant and Melancholy Strains of *Polly Peachum*, and *Lucy Lockit*: The Merry and half Tragick Flights of Captain *Mackheath*; with the humourous Dialogue between the Captain and his Seraglio of dainty Doxies, and his parting with his dearly beloved Gang: Also the Passages between the honest Goal-keeper *Lockit* and his Daughter.

Also their Famous *Posture-Master* and *Tumbler*, who in both parts Performs several uncommon things, and has had the honour to perform before His present most Sacred Majesty and most of the Nobility with general Applause.

Note, There are fresh Entertainments every Night, perform'd by Men and Women.

Note, This piece of Work is intirely New.

Performing every Evening at 7o' Clock.

Vivant Rex & Regina.

Playbill from the archives of the Spalding Gentlemen's Society

Warton felt that it had been praised too much and found it difficult to discover the fine vein of concealed satire supposed to run through it. He took the question of its morals lightly, but blamed it for an accidental mischief that attended its success: "It was the parent of that most monstrous of all dramatic absurdities, the Comic Opera."[97]

It is unnecessary here to make any long list of the number of imitations that appeared in such rapid succession, and continued to be offered in the theatres, until in the middle of the century the ballad opera suffered a sea change and became more properly comic opera. One imitation was staged at the Haymarket during the original run of *The Beggar's Opera*, and Tom Walker was ready with his *Quaker's Opera* before that first summer was out. Cibber attempted to retrieve his mistake of 1728 by writing an imitation of the rejected play the next year, called *Love in a Riddle*, but his effort was badly received, owing, Cibber says, to the report which was spread abroad that he had engineered the rejection of Gay's new opera, *Polly*, by the Lord Chamberlain. The account which Kitty Clive gave of the disastrous first night will reinforce our notions of the behavior of audiences in those days.

> I remember the first Night of *Love in a Riddle* (which was murdered in the same Year) a Pastoral Opera wrote by the *Laureat*, which the Hydra-headed Multitude resolv'd to worry without hearing, a Custom with Authors of Merit. When Miss *Raftor* came on in the Part of *Phillida*, the monstrous Roar subsided. A person in the Stage-Box, next to my Post, called out to his Companion in the following elegant Stile— "Zounds, *Tom!* take Care; or this charming little Devil will save all."[98]

The list of imitations is interminable and most of them deserve the strictures which the more serious critics found for them. Sentimental tunes were competing with "machines" and masquerades for the public attention, and nothing more thought-provoking had a chance for success. Serious drama, after all, had come to a pretty low ebb, and one can hardly

[97] Joseph Warton, *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope* (5th ed., 1806), II, 245.

[98] W. R. Chetwood, *A General History of the Stage* (1749), pp. 127-128.

blame the public for wishing at least to be amused. By 1734, in *The Connoisseur, A Satire On the modern Men of Taste,* a writer was found to put the chagrin of the genuine artist over all this musical nonsense plainly.[99]

> Now *Gothic* Sing-song only charms the Age,
> And drives true *Roman* Learning from the Stage;
> Nonsense to Numbers by Musicians set,
> Turns every Ballad-Singer to a Wit,
> And every Thing that scarce can write his Name,
> Starts up a Poet, and disputes for Fame:
> A tuneful *Feast* to the *Weak Ear* they give,
> While our starv'd Minds no Benefit receive.
> *Cassius* submits to *Brother you're i' the' wrong,*
> And *Cato's* Tastless 'cause without a Song.
> This universal Wit suits every Place,
> Sung by the Groom, as well as by his G—ce;
> Whilst at the Toilette the long Hour to pass,
> The Lady gently hums *Fill ev'ry Glass;*
> *Joan* in the Kitchen to an humbler Strain,
> Chaunts squalling, *She'll be cheap in Drury-Lane.*[100]

The worst in the way of imitations was over by the end of 1736, but *The Beggar's Opera* continued supreme above all imitators in never-ending popularity. It was translated into Danish, French, German, and Latin. It did not suit French taste; at any rate, one French traveler damns it,[101] and the play translated was refused a stage in Paris in the mid-century.[102] Gay's fame overseas rested largely on *The Fables.* But at home *The Beggar's Opera* was his most conspicuous success. His recipe had not been found wanting; the combination of realistic presentation, popular melodies for the songs, and pleas-

[99] *Ibid.,* p. 127. For further information about ballad operas in imitation of Gay's, see W. E. Schultz, *Gay's Beggar's Opera,* and E. M. Gagey, *Ballad Opera.*

[100] P. 17. The last song mentioned is from *The Mock Doctor, or The Dumb Lady Cured,* by Henry Fielding, produced in Drury Lane, 1732.

[101] *A Foreign View of England in the Reigns of George I and George II. The Letters of Monsieur César de Saussure to his Family translated and edited by Madame van Muyden* (1902), p. 273.

[102] But see *Biographia Dramatica,* II, 55: "*The Beggar's Opera.* Translated into French, by the title of *L'Opera du Gueux,* by A. Hallam. Representée sur le Petit Theatre François dans le Marche au Foin. 8vo. 1750."

antly acid satire, had won him a vast audience. He was now independent of patronage. No longer after working hard at verses, as in *The Fables*, must he court the favours of the great and be rewarded with insult. The managers would seek him now, and he could dictate his own terms.

> Yet *Gay*, whose Praise resounding People sung,
> And suck'd the Satyr from a honey'd Tongue,
> To whom each party paid the due Applause,
> Scarce found a Patron to befriend his Cause.
> That luckless Fav'rite of the tuneful Nine
> Full oft was forc'd on empty Praise to dine,
> Till Humour, heighten'd to its utmost Pitch,
> Found out a ready Purchaser in *Rich*,
> Whose bounteous Hand reliev'd a shiv'ring Muse,
> And gave, what Courts unblushing could refuse.
> Then, silly Bard, desert the Great with Speed;
> Court the kind Actor, and your Suits succeed.[103]

[103] *The Seventh Satyr of Juvenal Imitated* (1745), p. 8.

For Nigel Playfair's revival of *The Beggar's Opera* in 1920 and of *Polly* in 1922 see his *Story of the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith* (1925). The following notes are of special interest:

"The next thing to be tackled was the Book of the Words, and I undertook, on behalf of the other interested parties, the herculean task of reading it through—a task which, I can assure you, took a great deal of faith, hope, and trust in the judgment of critics dead and gone (but a great deal wiser than myself). For to tell you the truth, to people who are in the habit of keeping themselves alive on a light diet, 'The Beggar's Opera' swallowed at one sitting, just as Gay wrote it, is a pretty indigestible dish! I can claim the merit of recognising its plums; but I came very often very near to be choked by its suet. I'm not quite sure what a colander is, but I felt that some such implement must be wielded at once to reduce its density; and this function I decided to entrust to Arnold Bennett. I am happy to say that he saw very quickly how it could be done; and more readily than I did, I think, he recognized the splendid quality of Gay's work. At any rate, within a couple of days 'The Beggar's Opera' had been analysed, dissected, and put together again by him, and we had a version ready to put to the test of rehearsal.

"Austin was locked up in a room (without, I am afraid, the two bottles of claret and the plate of anchovy sandwiches which Sheridan enjoyed in a similar situation) to complete his musical arrangement. And from that room during the rehearsals proceeded at intervals his score. (P. 92.)

"With the large popular audiences which then began to throng the Lyric, even though they appreciated (as I'm sure they did) the scenery, and dresses, the music, and the methods of production, it was the actual play of Gay himself, and the words of the dialogue and the songs which won their particular affection." (Pp. 101-102.)

CHAPTER VII

LAST YEARS WITH THE QUEENSBERRYS (1728-1732)

I

The skies were rosy that spring for Gay. Friends thronged about, and now he was in a position to enjoy them with more careless ease than usual. They were for the most part the same friends whom he had known for years. Some new ones appeared like Dr. Delany, whom Swift sent to him, but death alone had power to separate him apparently from the old group. About the middle of March he was visiting Cashiobury with Pulteney, glad once again to be with Lord Essex whom he had known since the old days when he had served in the Monmouth household. Somewhat later, about the sixth of May,[1] the Duchess of Marlborough and Congreve took him along with them to Bath, where he spent the next five or six months. As we have seen already he busied himself there part of the time supervising the production of his play. Otherwise he took his ease, hoping to lay in a stock of health for the coming winter. He played no games, he says, but backgammon with Lewis, and endeavored to husband his financial resources as carefully as he could in such spendthrift society. Swift was always lecturing him on this point, suggesting that he get Pulteney, Bolingbroke, and Pope to arrange an annuity for him, though he had confidence enough in Gay's business acumen to use him as agent for some funds of his own at this time. On July 6, Gay wrote to Swift from Bath that he was setting out in five or six days on an excursion to Lady Scudamore's place, Holme Lacy on the Wye, and proposed to spend two or three weeks there. Lady Scudamore was an aunt of Pope's friend Robert Digby, and one wonders whether it was through her that Pope and Martha

[1] Swift, *Letters*, IV, 32.

Blount got the impression that the Bath society Gay moved in was not the best in the world for him; for Martha had some curious things to say in a letter she wrote to Mrs. Howard on August 23. She wrote first of Pope's return from Stowe and then continued:

I am very glad Mr. Gay has yet a chance of geting from those Lords and Ladies that so very ill deserve his company I can only wish him well wch I sincerely do but it is I am sure more in yr power to persuade him then in any others.[2]

It may be that Pope, who was especially depressed by his own and his mother's ill health at that time and perhaps also by the clouds of enemies that his writings had brought about him, was fearful lest the gay life of the watering place would ruin his friend's health, and in that case the event proved his foreboding justified. Swift also had the notion that Bath society might injure Gay in health and in pocket. He wrote to Pope on July 16:

I suppose Mr. Gay will return from the Bath with twenty pounds more flesh, and two hundred less in money. Providence never designed him to be above two-and-twenty, by his thoughtlessness and cullibility. He has as little foresight of age, sickness, poverty, or loss of admirers, as a girl of fifteen.

Swift knew even better than Pope how difficult it was for a man of moderate means to resist the temptations to extravagance either in his habits of life or of finance in that sort of society. It was the waste of money that made Swift indignant, since he says elsewhere that Gay was "not intemperate in a physical sense."[3] Probably it is simply true that Gay was gambling; certainly he was seeing more of Henrietta, Duchess of Marlborough, than Pope would like. Pope may have felt that Gay was drifting away gradually from the inner circle of his friendship, and he may have talked to Martha Blount about it with a mixed spirit of regret and ill-recognized jealousy, a regret and jealousy which her letter reflects. Mrs. Howard's letters continue the same affectionate tone of disinterested friendship. She regrets

[2] British Museum *Addit. MSS* 22626. f. 9.
[3] Swift, *Letters*, IV, 60.

that the waters are not of more use to Congreve—he died the following winter in London, January 29, as a result of injuries received in a carriage accident at Bath—and sends her compliments to the Duchess of Marlborough and to him. She has a thousand things she wants Gay to do, among them to help her answer some letters she has received from Lord Chesterfield. She may come to Bath herself, and if she does, insists on being governess to Arbuthnot and him.[4] Gay replied with the gossip that he knew would interest her: "Lord Essex gives a private Ball in Harrison's great Room to Mrs. Pelham this evening, so that in all probability some odd Bodys, being left out we shall soon have the pleasure of being divided into Factions."[5]

It must have been a particularly merry season at Bath, for in addition to those in Gay's circle already named, Lady Bolingbroke was there for a time, Lady Oxford and Peggy for the whole summer. Lancelot, Patty Rolt's husband, arrived presently with Lord Sussex and spread the news that Swift was coming.[6] Then, about September 1, Pope arrived wretchedly ill and worried, *Athanasius contra mundum*, as Harley put it in a letter to Swift,[7] too ill really to get much pleasure out of society, as he got no help by drinking the waters. He had proceeded to Bath by careful stages from one friend's house to another, the last night at Sir William Codrington's, only a mile from Bath, where a bevy of ladies in procession had prepared and administered physic to him, Lady Cox with the gallipot of physic, Lady Codrington with a vial of oil, Mrs. Bridget Bethel with pills, and a fourth sister with spoons and teacups. The ghost of Dr. Woodward himself would have rejoiced to behold that procession, wrote Pope to Martha Blount, September 4, 1728. He was able the next day to start taking the waters without the usual preparation, much to the astonishment of Dr. Arbuthnot and Gay, who were put in an uproar over his unexplained wilfulness. Pope remained in Bath for six weeks or more. He must have left soon after October 12, when he wrote

[4] Countess of Suffolk, *Letters*, I, 297, 312.
[5] British Museum *Addit. MSS* 22626. f. 24.
[6] Swift, *Letters*, IV, 36.
[7] Historical Manuscripts Commission, *MSS of the Marquis of Bath* (1904), I, 253.

to Swift about his experiences there, as in a letter to Bathurst dated November 7 he says he had been back at home for some time.[8] Gay would leave at about the same time, doubtless with the Marlborough family.[9]

On October 31 of this year his name along with Pope's found its way into the rolls of the Gentlemen's Society of Spalding, so that another old friend, Maurice Johnson, was probably about London to greet him on his return from Bath and to renew a friendship begun over fifteen years earlier. It seems odd that no letters between these friends exist except those already referred to, dated January 13 and April 23, 1713. With Johnson's antiquarian proclivities and his eagerness to encourage correspondence with his distinguished London friends, one would have expected a large budget of letters to survive.

About the middle of November, Gay had a severe attack of fever which kept him confined to his rooms for about ten days, but when he wrote to Swift on December 2, he was expecting to be abroad in two or three days. By that time he had finished writing *Polly*, his sequel to *The Beggar's Opera*, but to his surprise Rich had received orders from the Lord Chamberlain to delay rehearsals until further notice.

Gay's attitude towards this sequel was skeptical from the start. He wrote it while in Bath, with a view of taking care of himself, as he puts it to Swift. The chance to repeat the success of *The Beggar's Opera* was too good to miss, but it is clear from the introductory dialogue between the poet and the player that Gay felt that he was risking his reputation for his profit.[10] Some of the critics will have it that he wrote *Polly* to complete the moral lesson which was somewhat neglected in the first play.

> This Opera was intended by the author, as the second part of the celebrated *Beggar's Opera*, which being deemed a piece of evil tendency, the Lord Chamberlain prohibited the sequel, *wisely* imagin-

[8] Pope, *Works*, VIII, 332. [9] Swift, *Letters*, IV, 52.

[10] Swift doubted the advisability of a sequel. See his letter to Lord Orrery, March 22, 1733 (*Letters*, IV, 403): "I have often thought that hints were owing as much to good fortune as to invention, and I have sometimes chid poor Mr. Gay for dwelling too long upon a hint, as he did in the sequel of the Beggar's Opera."

ing it must be *equally* dangerous; whereas in this opera, poetic justice is done to all the *worthy* characters in the preceding piece, who, in this are transported to the plantations, according to their *merit;* of course, in point of moral, the *Beggar's Opera* is incomplete without the addition of *Polly;* and in all likelihood the author wrote this second part to atone for any mischief which the first might occasion; at any rate, it is sufficient to prove the writer's detestation of vice, and love of justice.[11]

Gay was aware of the criticism that had been made of his first opera, that he had given up his moral for a joke, and may have been glad enough to satisfy the critics, since he must do that perforce from the exigencies of the plot he had contrived. For the transference of Polly and Macheath from a plot laid in a world of vivacious contradiction to one contrived on the familiar virtue-in-distress model inevitably led to sad deterioration in both these characters, and the huddled-up marriage with the beautiful-souled savage may have been satisfactory to the moralizers, but could please few besides. Macheath disguised as a Negro and tied helplessly to the apron strings of *one* doxy, lacking even courage and willing now to betray his comrades, can awaken no thrills and scarcely any interest, while Polly, whose chief claim upon us in the first opera is the fact that she is, as Mr. F. W. Bateson well says, "equally a real character of sentiment and a caricature of sentimentalism,"[12] in the sequel collapses entirely into the ordinary sentimental heroine, whose last shift, though she still admires the manly air, grace and stature of her hero, leads her finally into the arms of her Indian lover. It seems early to find so sharp a contrast between the unspoiled children of nature and the sophisticated ingrates of a professedly higher civilization. To that extent, the opera has some claim to originality. Otherwise, there is nothing fresh about it. The dialogue has been censured as ponderous;[13] the satire has lost a good deal of its edge, though there is quite enough life left

[11] *The History of the Theatres of London: containing an Annual Register of all the New and Revived Tragedies, Comedies, Operas, Farces, Pantomimes, &c. that have been performed at the Theatres-Royal in London, From the Year 1771 to 1795* (1796), I, 63-65.

[12] *English Comic Drama, 1700-1750* (1929), p. 102.

[13] C. H. Gray, *Theatrical Criticism in London to 1795* (New York, 1931), p. 238.

in the portrait of Ducat to justify the Lord Chamberlain in his attempt to protect his friend Walpole. Many of the palpable hits on flattery and lack of sincerity, the usual vices of the court, lose point when the action is transferred to the plantations, and sometimes seem to be foisted upon the dialogue by old habit merely. The preaching is good, too good really, when one remembers that at least two scenes are introduced for their sexual piquancy alone. The songs seem to have been thrown together rather hastily, and with one or two exceptions are prosy enough; indeed, one wonders why anyone should bother to find music for them. All the same, Gay shows his usual good stage sense; he knows how to find a succession of varied scenes, and I have little doubt that if the play had been produced it would have been still more popular with the uncritical mob than its predecessor. They at least would not have been offended by the commonplace moralizing nor by the slight accompanying vein of disguised pruriency; they would on the contrary have been comforted by both.[14]

[14] This rather harsh judgment of *Polly* is, I think, supported by the experience of those responsible for the arrangement of the opera for production in 1922. In the edition of *Polly* issued by Boosey & Co. in that year Frederic Austin printed the following note to explain his treatment of the original music:

"The original published music of *Polly* consisted, as did that of *The Beggar's Opera,* of a number of short tunes, borrowed from traditional or contemporary sources, to which basses, and, in the case of *The Beggar's Opera,* an overture, had been added by Dr. Pepusch. These melodic fragments (in *Polly,* fifty or so of a possible seventy-two) form the foundation of the present versions of both works, and have been used to make such simple or extended numbers as the musical or dramatic circumstances of the stage-action as now planned have made necessary. I have written an overture for *Polly,* based upon airs that are sung during the course of the opera, and am responsible, as before, for all material other than the traditional tunes themselves. . . .

"Mr. Clifford Bax has largely reconstructed the play itself—a proceeding held to be necessary before successful performance was possible—and while every effort has been made to retain Gay's original words, such reconstruction has sometimes involved a certain revision of the original lyrics. In some instances Mr. Bax, giving way to my representations, has followed the original author's precedent, and has himself written verses for tunes that were too good to be omitted, but that otherwise would necessarily have been laid aside. Incidentally, this process of alteration has made it possible here and there to restore to some of the tunes an obscured musical outline, or a lost rhythmical or other significance."

I should add Mr. Clifford Bax's own *Apology,* which appears in the Chapman & Hall printing of 1923.

"In perusing the lyrics of this play the reader will be distressed by many graceless irregularities of rhythm. A long apprenticeship to the craft of making words fit music has convinced me that the more precisely they follow the musical pattern the more

But the play was prohibited by the Lord Chamberlain and did not come to the test of stage production until nearly fifty years after it was composed. Gay printed it at once and made the whole story of the prohibition public in his preface. Apparently, he had risen from a sickbed to try to get the Duke of Grafton to change his attitude and pass the opera for rehearsal, but the Duke refused to hear the play read at that time, and Gay thought that he had not read it before. Walpole was no doubt right in thinking that no matter how innocent a continuation of Macheath's fortunes might prove to be in itself, the public who had jeered him through sixty-two nights of *The Beggar's Opera* would find food for fresh insults in the new play, and he did not propose to put up with them. He would fear also what actors might do by way of caricature, and he knew already how disastrous the re-pointing of some of the speeches might be. "He resolved," says Lord Hervey in his *Memoirs*, "rather than suffer himself to be produced for thirty nights together upon the stage in the person of a highwayman, to make use of his friend the Duke of Grafton's authority as Lord Chamberlain to put a stop to the representation of it. Accordingly this theatrical *Craftsman* was prohibited at every playhouse."[15] This last phrase is of interest, as it shows that Walpole distrusted Gay's close association with Pulteney and Bolingbroke, who controlled *The Craftsman*, and shows moreover that Hervey thought Gay's part in the confederacy was to write theatrical pamphlets rather than actual ones for the pages of opposition newssheets, for Gay had evidently been accused, if only in general terms, of writing disaffected libels and seditious pamphlets. His protestations of innocence on this charge in the preface to *Polly* are, so far as I know, ingenuous.

The Lord Chamberlain's final decision was announced on December 12, 1728, and then the storm broke. The censorship

disagreeable they are to read. I trust that the reader whose ear is offended by a line that is too long or by one that slips away too flowingly will remember that the lyrics are intended to be sung."

Actually, only about a third of Mr. Bax's text is Gay's.

[15] John Lord Hervey, *Memoirs of the Reign of George the Second, from his accession to the death of Queen Caroline* (1848), I, 121.

of *Polly* became at once a *cause célèbre,* and everyone who had a grudge against the government rallied to Gay's side and urged the injustice of this discrimination. Most of Gay's friends were among these injured souls, so that their motives for action were doubled—love of Gay and hatred of Walpole added vehemence to their protests. Swift disapproved of printing before the play was acted, but Gay wanted a chance to state his own position and had no hope that the prohibition of the play would be rescinded. He decided to print, and a subscription list was started. For a time it looked as if the quarrel would be carried on over his dead body, for towards the end of December he came down with the most serious fit of illness he had yet experienced. Fever, pleurisy, and asthma combined to rack his body, as the worry of his professional difficulties no doubt racked his mind, and only Hampstead air, Dr. Arbuthnot's constant attention, and the tender care of his friend, the Duchess of Queensberry, finally brought him back to life.[16] The whole situation was just too much for Kitty Hyde's affectionate nature. She took the subscription list for *Polly* to court with her and proposed to add names under the very eyes of the King; for her impudence she was forbidden the Court altogether.[17] The Duke, who was about to relinquish his offices anyway for other reasons, followed her into glorious banishment. Even Mrs. Howard declared herself strongly. In the meantime, subscriptions for *Polly* poured in.[18] Henrietta, Duchess of Marlborough, was known to have subscribed £100 for a single copy, and the final list totaled well up to £1,200. Indeed, when Gay wrote to Swift (March 18, 1729) during convalescence, he must have felt that disappointment had brought its consolations, particularly in the evidence of sincere friendship every day thrust upon him. All the old

[16] *The Country Journal: or, The Craftsman.* By Caleb D'Anvers, of Gray's Inn, Esq. Jan. 11, 1729.—"We hear that John Gay, Esq.; Author of the *Beggar's Opera,* who was reported to be dead, is on the mending hand."

[17] See Mrs. Delany's account in *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs. Delany* (1861), I, 193.

[18] Applebee's *Original Weekly Journal*, Saturday, March 8, 1729.—"The Subscription, for the Sequel, or Second Part of the *Beggar's Opera,* which has made such a Noise here, is a Guinea each, and the same will be published with all convenient Speed."

names appear, Mr. and Mrs. Pulteney, Pope, Mrs. Blount, Mr. and Mrs. Rollinson, Lord and Lady Bolingbroke, Lewis, Lord Bathurst, Sir William Wyndham, Lord Gower (Essex's old friend too, and a kinsman of the Duchess of Queensberry), and Lord Oxford. The whole town was with him, regarded him as oppressed, and themselves as defrauded of amusement.[19] The most vivacious account of his notoriety is from Dr. Arbuthnot's pen in a letter to Swift, March 19, 1729.

The inoffensive John Gay is now become one of the obstructions to the peace of Europe, the terror of the Ministers, the chief author of the Craftsman, and all the seditious pamphlets which have been published against the government. He has got several turned out of their places; the greatest ornament of the Court banished from it for his sake; another great lady in danger of being *chasée* likewise; about seven or eight Duchesses[20] pushing forward, like the ancient Cir-

[19] *The Craftsman,* Dec. 14, 1728: "We hear that the Sequel to the Beggar's Opera, which was going into Rehearsal at the Theatre in *Lincoln's-Inn-Fields,* is suppressed by *Authority,* without any particular Reasons being alleged; but we doubt not that the Publick will be soon made acquainted with the *Exceptions* to it, which must be very strong, since the *Properties* of so many People are concerned in this Affair. It is hoped, from *this Circumstance,* that the celebrated Mr. Cibber's *Opera* (which we are assured is perfectly *inoffensive*) will be now acted with great Success." See also *The Craftsman,* March 8, 1729, and May 28, 1737: "The *Lord Chamberlain* hath already a Power of prohibiting all *offensive Plays,* and of interdicting the *Players,* when They transgress their Bounds. At least, He assumes to Himself the Exercise of *such a Power,* whether strictly *legal* or not; as We formerly saw in the Case of Sir *Richard Steele,* and since in That of an old Play, call'd the *Fall of Mortimer,* and the *second Part of the Beggar's Opera.* What Occasion therefore is there for the Legislature to interpose, in this Case; or to put all *dramatick Writers* and *Entertainments,* however innocent and useful, under the absolute Power of an *Officer of the Crown?*" *Fog's Weekly Journal,* Feb. 8, 1729, has the following Epigram:

> Two Accidents the weekly Bills have miss'd,
> One *Poet muzzled,*—and another *hiss'd.*
> Each from the Stage, and tow'ring Hopes cast down,
> One by the C[ourt], the other by the *Town.*
> The one as much despis'd, as t'other fear'd,
> *Philanthus* damn'd by Tryal,—*Gay* unheard.

And again in the issue for June 7, 1729, he remarks: "And I hope Mr. *Gay* will be instructed to change his Opinion from these useful Observations, and not term his Operas, *Nugae,* since, notwithstanding powerful Obstacles, they have prov'd more advantageous to him, than his Volume of Fables:—He should have reserv'd the latter for an Age of less curious Taste, when musty Morals might have been fashionable, then they might have procur'd him Reputation and Profit.—This refin'd Age has more elevated Notions, and therefore all moral Writers must yield up the Bays to *Hurlothrumbo,* or the *Super-Natural.*"

[20] See *The Female Faction, or the Gay Subscribers* (1729); *The Banish'd Beauty: or, a Fair Face in Disgrace* (1729); *Additions to the Works of Alexander Pope*

cumcelliones in the Church, who shall suffer martyrdom upon his account first. He is the darling of the city. If he should travel about the country, he would have hecatombs of roasted oxen sacrificed to him. Since he became so conspicuous, Will Pulteney hangs his head to see himself outdone in the career of glory. I hope he will get a good deal of money by printing his play, but, I really believe, he would get more by showing his person; and I can assure you, this is the very identical John Gay, whom you formerly knew, and lodged with in Whitehall two years ago.[21]

Gay printed *Polly* at his own expense, in quarto, to be sold at six shillings with the music. Bowyer was the printer and struck off ten thousand, five hundred copies in the first year. That seems to have been the only authorized edition during Gay's lifetime, though there were at least three pirated editions. One of these followed close on the publication of the original edition on March 25. The following paragraph appeared in *The Evening Post* for April 10, 1729:

Yesterday two illegal, false, and spurious Editions of Polly, an Opera; being the second Part of the Beggars Opera were publish'd; the one in Octavo without the Musick, Printed for Jeffrey Walker in the Strand, the other in Octavo with the Musick at the End, printed for J. Thomson. This is to advertise all Booksellers, Printers, Publishers, Hawkers, etc. not to sell or cause to be sold any of the said Editions, the sole Property of the said Book, being according to Act of Parliament vested in the author, for whom the Book is printed with the Musick on Copper Plates in Quarto. Prosecutions with the utmost Severity will be put in Execution against anyone who shall presume to sell any of the aforesaid illegal spurious Editions.

Later, on June 12, counsel for Gay obtained judgment in the Westminster Court of Chancery against several booksellers for selling the pirated editions.[22] Thus the opera cost Gay considerable vexation of spirit all around, and perhaps the large sum of money he made out of it was little enough compensation.

(1776), I, 105. Here we find the Duchess of Queensberry's reply to King George II when she was forbidden to appear in Court, followed by seven pages of verse inspired by that incident.

[21] Swift, *Letters*, IV, 72.

[22] *Weekly Journal*, June 14, 1729; Swift, *Letters*, IV, 80. Arbuthnot to Swift, May 8, 1729: "He has about twenty lawsuits with booksellers for pirating his book."

The play was finally produced, years later (in 1777), by George Colman, the son of Gay's old friend, but had no very great success. A contemporary critic speaks favorably of the alterations Colman made both in the dialogue and the music, says it was well performed and met with applause. "The satire, however, of this piece, being of a temporary nature, lost a great deal of its effect, and of course the Opera was no *standing dish*."[23]

One thing at least makes this performance of *Polly* remarkable in our imaginations, the fact that present in the theatre that night was the Duchess of Queensberry, then a very old lady. It was probably her last public appearance, for she died the following month.[24]

Polly certainly made more stir the year it was published than it ever has since. Undoubtedly a copy of it was packed with the wines and cheeses that Lady Bristol sent to her husband at Ickworth, the last of August that year. If so, the old man's irascible reply was justified, for apart from *Polly*, the year that starred Savage's poem on *The Wanderer* and Thomson's *Poem to the Memory of Congreve* could scarcely be called brilliant.

> I have received the several poems you sent me, but begin to think poetry at as low an ebb as policy; however, I must thank you for your kind intention & endeavour to entertain me by them, as well as by the wines & cheeses.[25]

One suspects that Lady Bristol neglected to put *The Dunciad Variorum* in this parcel.

II

April saw the end of Gay's immediate troubles over *Polly*, and he set out for Edinburgh with the Queensberrys early in May.[26] On this visit Gay first met Allan Ramsay. William

[23] *The History of the Theatres of London* (1796), I, 63-65. *Polly* was played at the Haymarket in 1782.

[24] *Reminiscences of Michael Kelly* (1826), II, 310. *Polly*, altered by Horace Smith, was used on Kelly's benefit night, June 16, 1813, but did not succeed and was withdrawn.

[25] *Letter-Books of John Hervey, first Earl of Bristol . . . 1651 to 1750* (Wells, 1894), III, 50.

[26] Swift, *Letters*, IV, 80.

Tytler, the printer, remembered Gay's visit to the shop.[27] Gay and Ramsay were about of an age and had been running parallel in more ways than one. Their collected *Poems* had been published in the same year. Ramsay had published *Fables* five years earlier than Gay. Both men were interested in and writers of ballads and songs. Indeed, Ramsay's *Gentle Shepherd*, though first produced without songs, was made over on the pattern of *The Beggar's Opera* at the instance of some enthusiastic schoolboys who proposed to act it.[28] Finally, Ramsay left an unpublished elegy in praise of Gay.

> To him & to a pictland wight
> We awe our thanks baith day & night
> Wha did frae dust and Rubish dight
> Blyth British tunes.[29]

The contact between the two poets seems to have been remembered in Edinburgh, for as late as July 2, 1853, *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal* published "Allan Ramsay and John Gay, An Imaginary Dialogue."

Gay returned from Scotland before June 9 and found his health much improved by the journey.[30] June and July were no doubt spent clearing up irritating business matters; by the first of August he was ready to go off once more with the Duke and Duchess of Queensberry, this time to Middleton Stoney, their home in Oxfordshire, near Bicester, where he spent the next three months or more. During his absence in Edinburgh, the lodgings at Whitehall, which he had occupied during the last six years, were judged not convenient for him and assigned to someone else. This meant—since the rooms were at the disposal of the crown—that royalty itself was aggrieved, probably by the Queensberry flare-up, and that the King wished

[27] Allan Ramsay, *Poems*, ed. George Chalmers (1800), I, xl n.

[28] W. J. Lawrence, "Reviving *The Gentle Shepherd*," *London Graphic*, Sept. 1, 1923.

[29] British Museum *Egerton MSS*, 2023. f. 92. I owe this reference to Professor Burns Martin; see his *Allan Ramsay* (Cambridge, Mass., 1931), p. 49. In the same volume of manuscripts is *A Pastoral Welcome To her Grace Cathrine Dutches of Queensbery on her Coming first to Scotland June 1723.*

[30] Swift, *Letters*, IV, 86.

further to mark his displeasure over that discourtesy. Gay held his commissionership of the lottery until 1731, so that Walpole, though Swift blamed him, had evidently no wish to descend to such petty reprisals. From this time until his death three years later, Gay lodged for the most part at one or other of the Queensberry places. "When princes," says Swift wisely, "have a private quarrel with their subjects, they have always the worst of the fray."[31]

Gay's letters to Mrs. Howard and Swift show that the summer and autumn at Middleton Stoney passed pleasantly. He was revamping *The Wife of Bath* for production the following winter, and had unnecessary fears lest the government might interfere once again.

> I have employed my time in new writing a damned play, which I wrote several years ago, called the Wife of Bath. As it is approved or disapproved of by my friends, when I come to town, I shall either have it acted, or let it alone, if weak brethren do not take offense at it. The ridicule turns upon superstition, and I have avoided the very words bribery and corruption. Folly indeed is a word, that I have ventured to make use of; but that is a term that never gave fools offense.[32]

Swift had forgotten all about Gay's old play and thought *The Wife of Bath* was from Shakespeare. He disapproved of Gay's plan to new-lick it, and urged fresh confidence and an attack on new subjects.

> The world is wider to a poet than to any other man, and new follies and vices will never be wanting, any more than new fashions. *Je donne au diable* the wrong notion that matter is exhausted; for as poets in their Greek names are called creators, so in one circumstance they resemble the great Creator by having an infinity of space to work in.[33]

Swift's lack of enthusiasm for Gay's project proved prophetic of the event. Rehearsals began at Lincoln's Inn Fields about December 15,[34] and the play was finally presented on January 19.

[31] *Ibid.*, IV, 113. [32] *Ibid.*, IV, 108. [33] *Ibid.*, IV, 112.

[34] *The Daily Journal*, Dec. 20, 1729, and Jan. 10, 1730: "We hear that a Comedy, call'd *The Wife of Bath*, written by Mr. Gay, having been revised and altered by him,

Once again it was a failure. Gay acknowledged to Swift, March 3, 1730, that "my old vamped play got me no money; for it had no success." Swift thought he should have changed the title and the names of the persons, but urged Gay to regard it as the effect of idleness and its failure as a matter of no consequence, since he was "in the prime of life, when invention and judgment go together."[35] Swift has two complaints to make about his friend at this time—his lack of poetical nerve and his willingness to be drawn away from the old association with Pope. Actually the two were one in Swift's mind. He was anxious to have his friend go on to fresh literary successes, and he felt that the company of the Queensberrys was not the most stimulating for poetical composition. He was very discreet, even gentle in his reproof, but the anxiety remained all the same. He probably did not realize that Gay's health was extremely unstable at this time. He remembered Gay's fresh youthful-looking face and found it difficult to believe these stories of ill-health which Pope and Arbuthnot were always retailing. "Mr. Gay is a scandal to all lusty young fellows with healthy countenances; and, I think, he is not intemperate in a physical sense."[36]

Gay had been forced to give up drinking wine the last two years, though he leaves it to Pope to mention the sad fact. He was always making plans for regular exercise, walking and riding, and moreover carrying them out, though his best efforts had little enough effect on his health. Besides, a few months in town seemed to be about all he could stand that year, and by the first of May he was ready to go off to Amesbury for the summer.[37] From time to time he talked of buying a small house near Pope—indeed, he was once on the point of buying the widow's house (Mrs. Vernon's)—but he felt that his circumstances were not yet sufficiently affluent for independent living even on a modest scale, and the plan came to nothing in the end.

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is now in Rehearsal at the Theatre-Royal in Lincoln's-Inn-Fields, and will be Acted in a few Days." See Genest, *Some Account of the English Stage from the Restoration in 1660 to 1830*, II, 514-516.

[35] Swift, *Letters*, IV, 133. [36] *Ibid.*, IV, 60.

[37] *Ibid.*, IV, 186. Gay had seen Pope very little that winter (*ibid.*, IV, 159).

He was happy with his Duke and Duchess and with their children and friends, and although the society at Amesbury may have been relaxing, it is doubtful whether his health would have permitted determined activity. Certainly his temper did not.

Life at Amesbury must have been pleasant that summer (1730). Gay made himself useful whenever he could to the Duke, who trusted him on several occasions with settling affairs of one sort or another for him. Swift got the impression that Gay was actually steward for the Duke, but this was not true except in a most informal sense. The Duke and Swift support each other in their confidence in Gay's business ability, whereas Bathurst laughingly questions, "Could any man but you think of trusting John Gay with his money? None of his friends would ever trust him with his own whenever they could avoid it,"[38] and suggests that Gay is much better qualified to bring increase from a woman than from a sum of money.

Frequently Gay was on Salisbury Plain riding or shooting partridges and quail. In between times he pretended to help the Duchess with her tent-stitching, or amused himself by laughing at her experiments in milking cows or drawing pictures. The two children were entirely his servants, and he wasted a good deal of time playing with them. He protested to Swift that since wine was forbidden no poetry could be expected from him, and apparently he wrote very little. He printed *The Wife of Bath* that year, and also a poem called *The Mad Dog*, which had already appeared in his *Poems* (1720). The latter for some reason he issued as by Hildebrand Jacob. Faulkner, the Dublin printer, claims that, in 1730, Swift wrote two acts of a comedy which he sent to Gay to finish. This was called, says he, *The Players' Rehearsal*, and all trace of it has been lost. If the story be true, it was but one more effort on Swift's part to stir Gay up to literary activity. Pope did his part also to attempt to arouse Gay from the too great comfort of Amesbury. On October 23, 1730, he wrote:

[38] *Ibid.*, IV, 213.

To illustrate "Description of Amesbury, or Ambresbury, Wiltshire; The seat of the Duke of *Queensbury*," *in* The British Magazine and Review, *October, 1782*.
Courtesy of the British Museum

We have lived little together of late, and we want to be physicians to one another. It was a remedy that agreed very well with us both, for many years, and I fancy our constitutions would mend upon the old medicine of *studiorum similitudo*, &c. I believe we both of us want whetting. There are several here who will do you that good office, merely for the love of wit, which seems to be bidding the town a long and last adieu.[39]

Gay was too utterly contented to think of moving yet. By November his health was improved, the asthma gone, but he still preferred his humdrum country life and wrote to Swift that if he were to live in Amesbury ever so long, he believed he would never think of London. On December 17 he wrote to Mrs. Howard:

I have no desire to come to town at all; for if I were there I can not see you; so that unless she turns me away, I am fixed for life at Amesbury: so that, as to everything that relates to me, I refer you to her letters.[40]

There were plenty of visitors at the house, among them Carteret, recently arrived from Ireland with many things to tell of Swift.

He seemed to take to me, which I take to proceed from your recommendation; though, indeed, there is another reason for it, for he is now out of employment, and my friends have been generally of that sort, for I take to them, as being naturally inclined to those who can do no mischief.[41]

In the meantime the death of the Laureate, Lawrence Eusden, in September, caused some little stir among Gay's friends, and, although Gay certainly indulged in no illusions about the possibility of appointment, many of the small poets thought him the man, and his name attained some notoriety in their verses.

Poor *Gay* tho' he had not *one Friend in the Court*,
Came like a bold *Beggar*, and made his Claim for 't;
But soon he was told, with a deal of Grimace,
If he'd part with the *Pension* he might have the Place.[42]

[39] Pope, *Works*, VII, 443.

[40] Countess of Suffolk, *Letters*, I, 405. [41] Swift, *Letters*, IV, 172.

[42] *The Universal Spectator*, Feb. 6, 1731, "A New Session of the Poets, For the Year 1730." This poem was quoted in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, Feb. 1731. See

Another poem, called *The Gardener's Congress on Colley Cibber's being appointed Poet Laureat*, gives the impression, a false one, that Gay actually attempted to get the place.

> Nor could Gay, the coy minstrel of nature and art,
> Tho' by Queensbro' led in, move the chamberlain's heart;
> Whoe'er meanly hopes in the household to settle,
> No, not e'en on a dunghill must raise a *court nettle*.[43]

The Monthly Chronicle announced the final decision in its November issue. "Colley Cibber, Esq; the famous Comedian, was about the same time made Poet Laureat to his Majesty in room of the Rev. Mr. Lawrence Eusden, deceased."

No doubt Cibber's services to the Hanoverian succession in writing *The Non-Juror* (1717) were still remembered, but Jacobites were not his only enemies, and when his appointment —obviously a ridiculous one—was announced, all the aspiring authors whose plays he had refused to read for Drury Lane set out to show how ill qualified he was for the post. The appointment was in the hands of the Lord Chamberlain, and in spite of this fact, Cibber, according to a letter from Thomson to Mallet printed in the *Philobiblon Miscellanies*, was distinctly careless like Gay in his treatment of the first Minister.

> Have you heard that our present blockhead Laureate, or Laureate Blockhead, has had a fling at Walpole, too? He had better bribe them to silence. Posterity will call him, if Posterity hear anything of the matter, the Maevius-Bavius Maecenas, the discelebrated Knight.[44]

After all, Cibber's name does not stand so low in a list that since Dryden's time had included Shadwell, Tate, Rowe, and Eusden.

Gay was not interested, had no reason to be, and did not bother to come up to town until the whole flurry was over. Finally he came to London with the Queensberrys on January 7

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also: *Notes and Queries*, 2d Series, X, 1 (July 7, 1860); *On Poetry, a Rapsody* (Dublin, 1733); *The Bays Miscellany, or Colley Triumphant*, n. d. (by Swift); Swift, *Letters*, IV, 187 and 200; *A Hymn to the New Laureate by a Native of Grubstreet* (1731).

[43] *The Fugitive Miscellany* (1774-1775), II, 60.

[44] IV, 26.

and remained in town until about March 27. He made his home with the Duke and Duchess in Burlington Gardens, but found plenty of time for visits to Pope at Twickenham and to his other friends. Pope's letter to Fortescue, first printed in Polwhele's *History of Devonshire*, refers to the renewal of old relations between Pope and Gay.

> Mr. Gay and I are here, reading (but not writing) all day long. He is the reverse of you, and hates exercise; nay, I cannot so much as get him into the garden. I employ myself yet a little there, and a little in casting my eye upon the great heap of fragments and hints before me, for my large and almost boundless work, to remove as much of which as is in any method, out of the rest, is so much clearing the way: therefore it is that I trouble you with so much transcribing.[45]

The pleasant relations between the two men at this time are vividly suggested in one of Pope's *Epistles* to Martha Blount.

> Gay pats my shoulder, and you vanish quite,
> Streets, Chairs, and Coxcombs rush upon my sight;
> Vex'd to be still in town, I knit my brow,
> Look sour, and hum a Tune, as you may now.[46]

III

Gay remained in town for about ten weeks that winter (1730-1731). His health was distinctly improved. On March 19 he had dinner with Lord Oxford, Lord Bathurst, and Pope, at old Jacob Tonson's in Barnes, and drank Swift's health, for he had once again become a moderate wine-drinker. A week later he supervised the first London performance of *Acis and Galatea* in Lincoln's Inn Fields. This charming little operetta with Handel's music had been written ten years earlier and first produced at Canons, the country house of the Duke of Chandos.[47] In his *Life of Handel* (1857), Schoelcher notes

[45] Pope, *Works*, IX, 118.

[46] "Epistle to the Same on her leaving the Town after the Coronation," in Pope, *Works*, ed. Warton, II, 323.

[47] There are three early undated editions in the Harvard College Library, probably all earlier than the 1732 edition. One of these is superscribed as "performed at Oxford."

that one of the songs in this opera, "Not showers to larks," was written by Pope, another, "Would you gain the tender creature," by Hughes, and that a third was lifted from Dryden's translation of the Ovid story, "Help, Galatea, help." A writer of the late eighteenth century, speaking of the association of Handel with the three friends, Pope, Gay, and Arbuthnot, at Canons in the early twenties, takes occasion to comment on the musical interests and acquirements of the three.

Pope not only had no knowledge of the science of music, but received no gratification from "the concord of sweet sounds." He heard the performances of Handel with perfect indifference, if not impatience. Gay was pleased with music without understanding it, but forgot the performance when the notes ceased to vibrate. Arbuthnot, on the contrary, who was a judge of music, and a composer, felt the merits of Handel, and conceived an esteem for him, which he afterwards displayed under the most trying circumstances.[48]

Acis and Galatea, which is the only example of collaboration between Handel and Gay except in the songs "'Twas when the Seas" and "Let us take the Road" already noted, remained mildly popular throughout its own century, and even down to the present day. In an essay called *An Enquiry into the Rise and Progress of Operas and Oratorios, with some Reflections on Lyric Poetry and Music* (1740), John Lockman looks back over the struggle between Italian and English modes in opera, notes the continued popularity of Italian opera, in spite of Addison's ridicule, until *The Beggar's Opera* for a time dissolved the spell, and then goes on to point out how in the end most of the English operas had to give way to the Italian.

Accordingly Mr. *Addison*, Mr. *Gay*, &c. took up their Pens, and gave the Public Pieces which were thought in no way injurious to their Reputation as Writers. But whether it was owing to the Inability of the Composers, the Defects of the Performers, or the too prevailing Influence of the *Italian* Opera, those *English* Pieces had not the wish'd for Success, if we except *Acis and Galatea*, which in

[48] *Anecdotes of George Frederick Handel, and John Christopher Smith. With Select Pieces of Music, composed by J. C. Smith, Never before published* (1799), p. 16.

every Respect charms, to this Day, Persons of the best Taste and Understanding.[49]

Mr. Nicoll records ten performances of the opera in 1732, four of them in December just after the poet's death.[50]

On March 26, 1731, when *Acis and Galatea* was produced, Gay was very much alive and hopeful about the future. A few days later we find him in Amesbury with the Queensberrys, but his visits to London and to the homes of various friends were frequent. He found Dawley, Lord Bolingbroke's place, particularly attractive that year, and visited him there early in August and again in October. On December 9 he was in town, this time with Pope, and planned to attend Aaron Hill's play, *Athelwold*, for Pope was drumming up a party. On that date Pope wrote to Hill:

I shall have the pleasure (sick or well) to be at the first representation of your play tomorrow, with Lord Burlington and Lord Bathurst, and one or two more. Another noble lord, who understands you best, must be contented to read the two last acts in his study: But Sir William Wyndham, with Mr. Gay, and some others, will be there also, in another place, in his stead.[51]

He calls Dawley, like Twickenham, his other home, but comes back faithful to his Duke and Duchess in the intervals. It was on one of his quick trips to London that he sought feebly to renew his acquaintance with Mrs. Drelincourt, to whom Swift had introduced him two years earlier, and for whom Gay was nursing a very gentle affection. We find him by August 7, 1727, doing errands for Swift at Mrs. Drelincourt's house in Soho, and he seems to have enjoyed the calls he made there. The lady was very civil to him, but he was too bashful or too little interested to interpret this as encouragement. Finally Swift wrote to him in exasperation (June 29, 1731):

You are the silliest lover in Christendom. If you like Mrs. Drelincourt, why do you not command her to take you? If she does

[49] John Lockman, *Rosalinda, a Musical Drama* . . . set to Music by Mr. John Christopher Smith (1740), p. iv.

[50] The most notable modern production was supervised by Martin Shaw and Gordon Craig in London on March 10, 1902.

[51] Pope, *Works*, X, 38. This letter is incorrectly dated by Elwin and Courthope.

not, she is not worth pursuing. You do her too much honor; she has neither sense nor taste if she dares to refuse you, though she had ten thousand pounds.[52]

It is perhaps significant that just before the visit to London on which Gay made that last futile gesture towards the lady, he had been counting up his own fortune and found it to amount to above three thousand, four hundred pounds, all debts paid. He calls himself "a happy, that is to say, an independent creature." He was not quite sure of the "happy," nor was he sure that marriage with Mrs. Drelincourt would affirm the pleasant adjective.

He was worried that summer about a fresh scheme for writing. The only thing in mind at the moment, after the work of revising the second edition of the *Poems on Several Occasions* had been completed, was a continuation of *The Fables*, a work destined, perhaps because of Gay's present associations and recent experiences, to be more sharply satirical of government than the first series. Swift was never enthusiastic about continuations and sequels, thinking rightly that one's best and most natural thoughts arise at the first flush of the new interest. He would like to have seen Gay busy like Pope on some grand seven-years' project, though his urgings are usually based, one must admit, on most mercenary motives, ever mindful of the time when youth and friends cannot be so freely depended upon. He teases Gay about his "hitch-hiking" habits, and reminds him that the interest on a thousand pounds is but a half-crown a day.

If your ramble was on horseback, I am glad of it on account of your health; but I know your arts of patching up a journey between stage-coaches and friends' coaches; for you are as arrant a cockney as any hosier in Cheapside, and one clean shirt with two cravats, and as many handkerchiefs, make up your equipage; and as for night-gowns, it is clear from Homer that Agamemnon rose without one.[53]

December 1, 1731, found Gay in town, but for the moment *The Fables*[54] was neglected in favor of lawsuits against pirating booksellers. Several of Gay's friends were bothered with law-

[52] Swift, *Letters*, IV, 233. [53] *Ibid.*, IV, 271. [54] *Ibid.*, IV, 275.

suits that year. Swift's proposed visit to England had to be cancelled because of the delay in one he was involved with, and Mrs. Howard also was up to the ears in Chancery that summer. Gay was melancholy on the whole subject and saw no end to his prosecutions except an attorney's bill as long as the book. He tried to persuade Mrs. Howard to keep clear.

I do not like lawsuits; I wish you could have your right without them: for I fancy there never was one since the world began, that, besides the cost, was not attended with anxiety and vexation. But as you descended from lawyers, what might be my plague perhaps may be only your amusement.[55]

Gay remained in town that winter. We find him trying tc carry out Swift's directions about the money entrusted to him, and, a still more difficult task, trying to make Lord Burlington through Pope's suggestions realize his duty by way of monuments to forgotten ancestors buried in St. Patrick's. By March 14, Gay was on the road once more, this time the guest of General Dormer at Rousham in Oxfordshire.[56] He complains at this time of feeling dispirited for want of some pursuit, and thinks he will presently get the Duchess to confine him to his own room four hours a day. These complaints of his get little sym pathy from Swift, who writes him a letter of excellent fatherly advice at this time (May 4, 1732) urging him to adopt a more regular system of life as a cure for his vaporings.

You mortally hate writing, only because it is the thing you chiefly ought to do; as well to keep up the vogue you have in the world, as to make you easy in your fortune. You are merciful to everything but money, your best friend, whom you treat with inhumanity. Be assured I will hire people to watch all your motions and to return me a faithful account. Tell me, have you cured your absence of mind? Can you attend to trifles? Can you at Amesbury write domestic libels to divert the family and neighbouring squires for five miles round, or venture so far on horseback without apprehending a stumble at every step? Can you set the footmen a laughing as they wait at dinner, and do the Duchess's women admire your wit? In

[55] Countess of Suffolk, *Letters*, II, 6. [56] Swift, *Letters*, IV, 285.

what esteem are you with the vicar of the parish? Can you play with him at backgammon? Have the farmers found out that you cannot distinguish rye from barley, or an oak from a crab tree? You are sensible that I know the full extent of your country skill is in fishing for roaches or gudgeons at the highest.[57]

In his reply, Gay tries to defend himself against some of the charges, particularly that of laziness, by outlining a day's activities in town, and telling his friend something of his literary plans. The second series of *The Fables* was on the point of completion, and plans for the new opera, *Achilles*, were maturing, though Gay does not mention the opera by name, possibly because of the impertinent curiosity of the postal authorities, who were still in the habit of opening much of Swift's correspondence.

This play must have been written during the summer of 1732 between the middle of May and the end of August. Gay had left London for Amesbury on the former date, and his letters to Swift show that he was well advanced with his work on *Achilles*, if not actually through with it, by the last of August, when he was ready for a visit to Sir William Wyndham's at Orchard Wyndham.[58] After his return to Amesbury about the first of October, he would have but a brief month for revision before he started for London to arrange production.

By November 16 he was in town, two weeks ahead of the Queensberry family, and busy arranging for the production of the play, but still with little confidence of success. He was too good a critic to overlook the weaknesses in the play, weaknesses which that summer, pleasant as it had been in many ways with his horseback riding on the plains and his partridge-shooting, he had not had the physical and consequently the mental strength to correct.

IV

Gay's letter to Pope after his return from Orchard Wyndham (October 7, 1732) shows a man constantly living and

[57] *Ibid.*, IV, 294.

[58] *Ibid.*, IV, 301.

working under the strain of disease. Exercise, systematic and constant as it had been, could do him no good, and he was utterly discouraged, with no resort left but patience. His own sense of duty and the fitness of things compelled him to go ahead with work of one kind or another, but all of these later pieces lack the lightness of touch and the jollity that one comes to associate with Gay's work. There is even a strain, slight though it be, of bitterness traceable in some of the lines, especially those which parallel conditions in his own experience. *Achilles* emphasizes the insincerities of high life with a persistence that makes one feel that this idea has become fixed with Gay. The second series of *The Fables* is built around the same notion with added emphasis on the corruption of the modern politician. *The Distress'd Wife* and *The Rehearsal at Goatham,* two plays published long after Gay's death but written no doubt in this last year or two, give further expression to the same closely related series of ideas, the unpalatable aftertaste of dependence, the insolence of greatness, the prevalence of bribery in political and even in social relations, the futility of office-seeking, the frivolities of the West End, as compared, oddly enough, with the solid virtues of the city. Sometimes there is a cynical edge to the satire, as in the treatment of fashionable marriage in *The Distress'd Wife,* which results from observation and not at all from experience. Sometimes the material of the plays or poems reflects Gay's own reaction to the injustice, or the fancied injustice, that he himself had been forced to put up with. His feeling is particularly clear in *The Rehearsal at Goatham,* where the broad-faced aldermen reveal their own vice and folly in their manner of refusing permission for the puppet-show man to go on with his performance. It seems to me true that this development of distrust in a social system that by nature he would have preferred to admire gave additional bite to the later *Fables* and made them more worthy to stand beside their model in Samuel Butler. Gay was the unwilling cynic, but he was a genuine one in these last years, though he confined his satirical attention to those phases of society that he knew at first hand. The lawyer's professional attitudes,

the politician's preference for fools as colleagues, the confirmed sycophant's dreary round, the statesman's empty front, the arrogance of coxcomb and fine lady, the scribbling crew and their envious backbiting turning friendship itself into a mockery —these are the ideas to which he returns with a constancy that amounts almost to obsession. Perhaps he felt in these last months the weight of misspent time and the futility of many a long chase that he would have preferred to forget altogether. There is also in these late works a recurrence of admiration for the steadygoing London tradesmen, for the industry and sobriety which give purpose to life and prosperity to the nation. In spite of this worship of commerce, partly inbred and sincere no doubt and partly Lilloesque affectation, Gay failed to appreciate the virtues of Walpole, whose strong government had made expansion possible. Perhaps Gay's eye—being single—failed to distinguish between end and means and saw only the good end clouded by the compromise methods used to attain it. One should not expect him to rise altogether superior to his own grievances and the pettifogging conversation of many of his opposition friends. He had learned that a man must suffer with his friends, as he makes clear in *Fable X* addressed to Swift. Experience has taught him much, and he now finds it difficult to be frivolous. That possibly is the reason why these late works fail on the whole to interest us. *The Distress'd Wife* is fundamentally a serious work, a comedy of manners with a purpose too critical to be soothing. Its pictures of aristocratic society are bitter and without relief. The characters drift into caricature, since the author lets himself loose from his old moorings in sane humor. It is not a pleasant play to read, and it is not true to nature, but true to a preconceived and quite irrational grudge. The later *Fables* are subject to the same criticism, and yet they have a power lacking in the first lot, a higher imagination and emotional reach which are reflected in matters like diction and figures.

> He look'd, and saw the miser's breast,
> A troubled ocean, ne'er at rest.

Or again of the ever-recurring politician,

I see him, mad and drunk with power,
Stand tott'ring on ambition's tower:
Sometimes, in speeches vain and proud,
His boasts insult the nether crowd;
Now, seiz'd with giddiness and fear,
He trembles lest his fall is near.

CHAPTER VIII

DEATH AND POSTHUMOUS REPUTATION

I

Working on these three plays and the second series of *The Fables* and refusing to follow Pope's suggestion to write panegyric verse on the royal hermitage, Gay came up to London in the middle of November, 1732, full not of hope but of determination, and immediately made arrangements with Rich at Covent Garden to put *Achilles* in rehearsal. But the fates had no future in store for him except that of reputation. Barely two weeks passed before he was attacked by his old complaint, and in three days, in spite of Arbuthnot's care and the help of two other physicians, he was dead. They called it inflammation of the bowels, and Arbuthnot wrote Swift that it was the most precipitate case that he had known; he had had, it seems, little hope of Gay's recovery from the beginning.

Gay died on December 4 at the Queensberry house in Burlington Gardens, where he had so frequently and so happily lived. His friends, a distinguished group, gathered around to pay him last honors. The body lay in state at Exeter Change until December 23, and was then buried in Westminster Abbey. The inevitable Curll *Life* gives the following account of the ceremonies:

> His Body was brought, by the Company of Upholders, from the Duke of *Queensberry's* to *Exeter 'Change* in the *Strand*, and on the 23d of *Dec.* after lying in very decent State, was, at Eight of the Clock in the Evening, drawn in a Hearse, trimmed with Plumes of Black and White Feathers, attended with three mourning Coaches and six Horses, to *Westminster-Abbey*. His Pall was supported by the Rt. Hon. the Earl of *Chesterfield;* the Lord Viscount *Cornbury;* the Hon. Mr. *Berkeley;* General *Dormer;* Mr. *Gore;* and Mr. *Pope*. The last Offices were performed by the Rt. Rev. Dr. *Wilcox*,

Bishop of *Rochester,* the Choir attending; and his Remains were deposited in the South-Cross-Isle, over against *Chaucer's* Tomb.

Gay's friends had refused to give Curll any information about his life, and the brief biography produced by that very unspeakable person is of no value. Yet one would expect the account of the funeral to be accurate enough. The "Mr. Gore" mentioned among the pallbearers must surely be one of the brothers of Gay's friend Lord Gower,[1] who was in London at the time, and not only Gay's friend but the Queensberrys'. Lord Gower himself saw the Duke and Duchess the week following December 9 in order to perform a friendly office for the Earl of Essex, another of Gay's friends, then English minister at Turin. On the above date he wrote to Essex about the Queensberrys and their grief over Gay's death.

They are at present in great affliction for the death of poor John Gay who came up to town before them upon some business & was carryed off in a few days by a very violent feaver; they will find a very great loss of him, for he was not only a very agreable entertaining companion but a sincere & usefull friend.[2]

Cornbury, the young brother of the Duchess of Queensberry, was there to mourn his friend, whose good opinion and advice had both been at his service frequently, as one sees in Gay's letters to Swift and in some lines of the later *Fables.* General Dormer was another friend of long standing. Berkeley was the friend and later the husband of Lady Suffolk. I fail to trace any personal connection with the Bishop of Rochester. He was also Dean of Westminster and naturally officiated.

Pope and Arbuthnot wrote immediately to Swift, who seemed strangely prescient of disaster, and refused to open their letter until five days after he had received it. Perhaps the most eloquent tribute to Gay's quality is Swift's utter refusal to say anything personal about Gay in the next letter he sent to Pope.

I received yours with a few lines from the Doctor, and the account of our losing Mr. Gay, upon which event I shall say nothing.

[1] "Gore" was a common spelling of the name.

[2] British Museum *Addit. MSS* 27732. f. 72.

I am only concerned that long living has not hardened me; for even in this kingdom, and in a few days past, two persons of great merit, whom I loved very well, have died in the prime of their years, but a little above thirty. I would endeavour to comfort myself upon the loss of friends as I do upon the loss of money, by turning to my account-book, and seeing whether I have enough left for my support; but in the former case I find I have not, any more than in the other, and I know not any man who is in a greater likelihood than myself to die poor and friendless.[3]

Charles Ford wrote to Swift on the day of Gay's funeral, and gave what was obviously the general opinion about the disease that killed him. "I am told poor Gay's play is now in rehearsal, and will please. It was that brought him to town a little before he died; though, without his fever, he could not probably have held out long anywhere."[4]

Arbuthnot was apparently almost surprised at the number of Gay's friends and the sincerity of their grief. Lord Bathurst, no literary man, found words to express his feelings more adequately than most of them. "Poor John Gay! We shall see him no more; but he will always be remembered by those who knew him, with a tender concern."[5] Even those who knew him only by reputation joined the general mourning, and no one thought it at all strange that the author of *The Beggar's Opera* should find a place beside Chaucer among the nation's dead. The Duke and Duchess of Queensberry continued their attentions even in death, and had an elaborate monument erected in the Abbey with a bust by Rysbrack. Pope prepared the epitaph, which later failed to satisfy Dr. Johnson, but which to most of us manages to say some true things about the man and say them well.

> Of manners gentle, of affections mild;
> In wit, a man; simplicity, a child:
> With native humour temp'ring virtuous rage,
> Form'd to delight at once and lash the age:
> Above temptation, in a low estate,
> And uncorrupted, ev'n among the great:

[3] Swift, *Letters*, IV, 380. [4] *Ibid.*, IV, 371. [5] *Ibid.*, IV, 411.

A safe companion, and an easy friend,
Unblam'd through life, lamented in thy end.
These are thy honours! not that here thy bust
Is mix'd with heroes, or with kings thy dust;
But that the worthy and the good shall say,
Striking their pensive bosoms—*Here* lies GAY.

The last lines smell dustily of old-fashioned metaphysical verse, and are—as Joseph Warton pointed out—an adaptation of some verses in a Latin elegy on the death of Prince Henry.[6]

With this poem were placed some simple lines to commemorate the affectionate regard of Queensberry and his Duchess, and finally the famous couplet,

Life is a jest; and all things show it.
I thought so once; but now I know it.

As we have already seen, these lines had been written years before and first published as "My Own Epitaph" in *Poems on Several Occasions* (1720). Some years later, during the serious illness of 1729, Gay had written to Pope that he felt he had no continuing city here, and asked him to put the little epitaph on his monument with whatever else he might consider appropriate. Many of the good folk who went to see the monument in Westminster Abbey when it was unveiled on May 1, 1733, felt shocked by the levity of the inscription, and one writer in the *Gentleman's Magazine* some years afterwards (October, 1738) poured scorn on the epigram and on its author. Actually, the little poem is profoundly significant in its relation to Gay's character and experience. Jest had been earnest, and what he thought earnest had in the end turned to jest. His contribution to the gaiety of the world had been the serious work of his life, and his deviations from *la bagatelle* had all ended in pain and disappointment.

Swift and Pope were doubtless the men who grieved most for Gay. Swift felt the deaths of Gay and of Arbuthnot as

[6] Swift suggested one improvement, the disappearance of the word *aching* following the other participle *striking*. The bust by Rysbrack was removed in December, 1938, to give an uninterrupted view of two wall-paintings attributed to the thirteenth century. See *Notes and Queries*, CLXXVI, 52-53 (Jan. 21, 1939).

terrible wounds near his heart. A long distance away from his English friends, he yet looked upon them as money in the bank from which he would receive at least annual interest, and now the circle was drawing in smaller and smaller. Pope mentioned some few of those still left in a letter to Swift dated May 17, 1739, and managed to include an estimate—a singularly just one, I think—of Gay's character.

> The mention of travelling introduces your old acquaintance Mr. Jervas, who went to Rome and Naples purely in search of health. An asthma has reduced his body, but his spirit retains all its vigour, and he is returned, declaring life itself not worth a day's journey at the expense of parting from one's friends. Mr. Lewis every day remembers you. I lie at his house in town. Dr. Arbuthnot's daughter does not degenerate from the humour and goodness of her father. I love her much. She is like Gay, very idle, very ingenious, and inflexibly honest.[7]

The women who loved him best were Mrs. Howard and the Duchess of Queensberry. I write Mrs. Howard, though she had been properly Lady Suffolk for more than a year before Gay's death. In spite of Swift's recurring doubts, doubts which Lady Betty Germaine's sturdy championship of her friend could not quite cure, Mrs. Howard was a sincere friend of Gay and again and again attempted to do him service. Indeed, her pertinacity may well have done him disservice, when we consider the jealousies of the Court and her own diminishing influence. When she sent George Berkeley to help carry Gay's body to the grave, she wept for the best friend that life had given her. The Duchess of Queensberry and she remained friends, perhaps with the added bond of a tender memory, and two years later the mistress of Amesbury wrote to her about those old and happy relations.

> I cannot leave off till I have told you some very strange things. Know then that for this four or five years last past we had sat our hearts on a certain hill that I am sure you have heard me mention; and now not only of that, but of the whole estate, we are in possession, and as yet I have not felt delighted; only mighty well satisfied:

[7] Swift, *Letters*, VI, 130.

is not this astonishing? I often want poor Mr. Gay, and on this occasion extreamly. Nothing evaporates sooner than joy untold, or even told, unless to one so entirely in your interest as he was, who bore at least an equal share in every satisfaction or dissatisfaction which attended us. I am not in the spleen, though I write thus; on the contrary, it is a sort of pleasure to think over his good qualities: his loss was really great, but it is a satisfaction to have once known so good a man. As you were as much his friend as I, it is needless to ask your pardon for dwelling so long on this subject.[8]

II

Among the mourners at the funeral was the Reverend Joseph Baller, Gay's nephew, come less, one presumes, to pay his respects to the dead than to look after the rights of the living.[9] On January 3, 1733, papers of administration over Gay's property were issued to his two sisters, Katherine Baller and Joanna Fortescue. The estate, with certain extras which included sums eventually paid by booksellers for infringement of the copyright of *Polly* (a suit begun by Gay three years before), and money accruing from a benefit night for the sisters during the run of *Achilles*, amounted to approximately £6,000. This was equally divided between them, as Gay had wished.[10] He had made no will.

The Devonshire sisters would also—at least technically—have control of the papers Gay left behind and would naturally seek to make what money they could out of the publication of poems or the production of plays. They were, however, without experience in such matters and without connections in the literary world. There was in any case no reason for seeking help beyond the circle of their brother's doubtless rather awe-inspiring friends, and on Queensberry in the first place and Pope in the second devolved the task of selection and all sequent arrangements. Queensberry gave the booksellers confidence, and Pope gave Queensberry confidence, and we may be fairly sure that both were anxious to do what they could to help Gay's sisters

[8] Countess of Suffolk, *Letters*, II, 109.
[9] Henry Lee, *Memoirs of a Manager* (Taunton, 1830), II, 170-175.
[10] Pope, *Works*, VII, 436.

when they could do it without injury to their poet's reputation. *Achilles* must certainly go on. Pope, differing from Swift, thought it a "true original," and encouraged the Duke to sponsor it with Rich. Pope's letter to Caryll, dated December 14, shows that even so early he had been looking over Gay's manuscripts and speculating on possibilities.

> Poor Gay has gone before, and has not left an honester man behind him; he had just put a play into the house, which the Duke of Queensberry will take care of, and turn to the benefit of his relations. I have read it, and think it of his very best manner, a true original; he has left some other pieces fit for the press.[11]

Swift early warned Pope of the necessity for discrimination, and by May 1 was so worried by the idea that much of Gay's loose trash might be allowed to appear that he passed to direct rebuke.

> I am sorry for the situation of Mr. Gay's papers. You do not exert yourself as much as I could wish in this affair. I had rather the two sisters were hanged than to see his works swelled by any loss of credit to his memory. I would be glad to see the most valuable printed by themselves, those which ought not to be seen, burned immediately, and the others that have gone abroad, printed separately like opuscula, or rather be stifled and forgotten.[12]

It is hard to believe that Swift was venting his spleen on Pope solely because of the publication of *Achilles* and the prospect of another dose of *The Fables*. Yet this seems to have been the case. His letter of warning may have been prompted by Pope's treatment of his own verse in the third volume of the Motte *Miscellany*, which came out in 1732. Pope had without much discrimination dumped too many of Swift's loose pieces into this grab-bag and contributed as little as possible himself, and Swift may have felt that there was danger that Gay might suffer in the same fashion. In any case, the letter had the proper stiffening effect—it was bound to be effective if the Queensberrys caught a glimpse of it—and only the few expected pieces actually found their way into print.

[11] *Ibid.*, VI, 335.

[12] Swift, *Letters*, IV, 430.

Swift need not have worried about *Achilles*, at least; the play added to rather than diminished Gay's stock of reputation. It was acted for the first time on February 10, 1733, and the account of its reception in *The Bee: or, Universal Weekly Pamphlet* (February 17) suggests popular approbation.

> This Day se'nnight the Opera of *Achilles*, written by the late Mr. Gay, was acted for the first Time, at the New Theatre in *Covent Garden*, to a crouded and splendid Audience; the *Pit* being chiefly fill'd with Noblemen and Gentlemen of Distinction, and the *Boxes* with Ladies of the first Quality. It is written on the same Model with the *Beggar's Opera;* only that the *Persons of the Drama* are of a superior Rank, turn'd into Travesty; the Plot being founded on the Story of *Achilles*, (taken from the *antient Poets*) who was conceal'd by his Mother *Thetis*, under the Disguise of Woman's Apparel, in the Court of King *Lycomedes*, to prevent his going to the *Trojan War*, where it was prophecy'd by the *Oracle* that he would be slain.—As this Story furnishes the Poet with several humorous Incidents, so He hath enlivened it with a great many agreeable Airs, in the modern *Ballad-way*, which met with a general Applause the first Night, and the Play continues to run with the same Success.[13]

As suggested by this writer, Gay's play dramatizes the story of Achilles and his disguise in the household of Lycomedes. The goddess-mother Thetis, fearing disaster if the youthful Achilles finds his way to the Trojan war, places him as a girl among the daughters of this prince. The love of Lycomedes for the hero and its farcical outcome, the love of Achilles for Deidamia, one of the sisters, and the arrival of Ulysses and Diomedes posing as merchants with offerings of rich silks and that stray suit of armor which alone interests this strange young lady Pyrrha, provide the thin thread of plot on which Gay strings the scenes of his opera. Some of the stage business would no doubt be ridiculous enough to carry the play for the good run of eighteen nights which it enjoyed, but one is inclined on the whole to agree with the anonymous writer in *The Daily Courant* (February 16, 1733) that the scenes are long and tedious, the

[13] *The Bee: or, Universal Weekly Pamphlet*, I, 97 (1733).

satire unintelligible, the wit low, and the moral past finding out. The songs certainly lack the lyrical beauty of much of Gay's writing in this kind, and frequently exhibit all the flatness of the ordinary libretto which must carry forward the plot instead of expressing some emotion.[14] Swift disliked the piece and felt that Gay's friends on the English side of the channel had done his memory little service by allowing its production. "I heartily wish his Grace had entirely stifled that Comedy, if it were possible, than do an injury to our friend's reputation only to get a hundred or two pounds to a couple of, perhaps, insignificant women."[15]

The usual stories were circulated about the part Gay's friends had taken in the composition of the opera. Tom Burnet, whose mind was more active in the abuse of Pope than in any other occupation, published *Achilles Dissected: Being a Compleat Key Of the Political Characters In that New Ballad Opera, Written by the late Mr. Gay.*[16] Here he apologizes for the faults which the play obviously has by attributing all defects to the officious aid of Pope and Arbuthnot, for he feels that Gay could never deviate into so much dullness. He seems to think the play overloaded with songs. This criticism is odd, since *Achilles* has actually fewer songs in proportion to its length than either of the other operas. He criticizes some of them in detail for their bathos, quoting from memory and incorrectly, as the play had not been printed at the time he was writing. Most of these criticisms are taken from the writer in *The Daily Courant* referred to above, who—as Mr. Faber points out—introduced into his commentary one absurd song which actually has no counterpart in the printed version of the play. This song, which might have passed well enough as burlesque in the actual production, certainly looks bad enough in cold print, and whoever had in hand the revision of the text for printing evidently took the critic's advice and omitted it.

[14] *The Daily Courant* for Feb. 21, 1733, says that Pulteney wrote the songs.

[15] Swift, *Letters,* IV, 413. The women were, of course, Gay's sisters.

[16] The title page reads "by Mr. Burnet." The added *First Satire of the Second Book of Horace, Imitated in a Dialogue between Mr. Pope and the Ordinary of Newgate* is signed "Guthry."

The Auditor (February 16, 1733) found some fault with the singing, but the play was on the whole well received. Perhaps the best index of its success with the general public was the publication of a guide to the classic myth involved, printed as *The Life of Achilles. Extracted from Various Authors; Necessary to be Perus'd by the Readers and Spectators of the New Opera, call'd Achilles. Written by the late Mr. Gay.* This was dated 1732, but no doubt appeared concurrently with the play.

The author of *The Satirist: In Imitation of The Fourth Satire of the First Book of Horace* (1733) thought the play familiar enough to use the name of a character in it as the label for a type.

> Paint a Court Pimp, a Slave to Lechery,
> And *Diphibus* cries out—by G—d, that's me.
> Why shou'd he think on him alone it bore?
> What Court in *Europe* is without a Score?

Among adverse critics was the author of *The Life of Mr. John Dennis,* published with the J. Roberts imprint in 1734 and specifically "not written by Mr. Curll." This writer expressed surprise that so good a comedy as Dennis's *A Plot and No Plot* had never been revived.

> This Comedy is so diverting, that it is very surprizing that none of the wise Managers of the Stage have ever thought it worth reviving, especially when there has been so great a Dearth of comick Humour, that a Thing, called a Comedy, tho' it had not the Shadow of one Joke in it, has ran eighteen Nights together; we mean *Achilles,* written by Mr. *Gay,* but would not by saying this, depreciate the other Writings of that Gentleman, which have the greatest Merit in them, particularly the *Beggars Opera,* wherein there are undoubtedly Wit, Humour, Satyr, Novelty, and all that can render an Entertainment of that kind truely agreeable.[17]

Tonson and Watts printed *Achilles* shortly after the February production, and it ran into two editions that year. Watts objected to some advertisement, which the Duke of Queensberry thought proper enough, and evidently won his point.

[17] Pp. 19-20.

SIR,

I am surpriz'd Mr. Watts should have any Objections to print the Advertisement. I think there can be no good reason given. It is in my opinion very proper to be prefix'd to the Book, but if you will either call upon me or send Mr. Watts, or acquaint me by letter what part of it is objected to, it may easily be alter'd if there appears to be any expressions that are improper; but I desire it may not be alter'd till I hear from you some way or other. I am

Sir,

Your humble Servt.

QUEENSBERRY.[18]

The letter shows that Queensberry was giving rather more attention to the details of this publishing business than one would have expected.

Achilles was not printed again until 1760; it was acted once in 1734, twice in 1737, and not again until 1774. At that time George Colman altered the play and renamed it *Achilles in Petticoats*. When separately printed the play bore the following advertisement:

The established reputation of the author of the Beggar's Opera, having induced Dr. Arne to compose new music for the Opera of Achilles, it is now revived with no very essential changes from the original piece; the chief alterations consisting of abridgement and transposition. For the sake of shewing the powers of the vocal performers, some new airs have indeed been inserted; but, perhaps, it were needless to point them out, as the curious reader may easily compare the two pieces, if the difference of stile does not too evidently distinguish the several hands.

The *Biographia Dramatica* tells us that the altered version met with small success.

III

The Distress'd Wife, acted at Covent Garden the following spring (March 5, 1734), had a somewhat similar history. The Duchess of Queensberry wrote Swift the day before and mentioned her interest in it. "Tomorrow will be acted a new play of our friend Mr. Gay; we stay on purpose now for that, and

[18] British Museum *Addit. MSS* 28275. f. 498.

shall go on Thursday for Edinburgh, where the greatest good I can expect, or hope for, is a line from you."[19]

This play also was revived in the seventies when Gay's vogue was at its height. They called it *The Modern Wife*, and it was performed but one night (April 27, 1771) for the benefit of Mrs. Lessingham.[20] It was printed in 1743[21] and again in 1750 with the following note:

> This Comedy was finished by Mr. Gay, and intended for the Stage before his Death; when it was left with his other Papers to the Care of his Noble Friend and Patron the Duke of Queensberry: His Grace has accordingly permitted it to the Press, and it is here printed from the Original in the Author's own Hand-writing.

The other play, *The Rehearsal at Goatham*, has never, so far as I know, been acted. One would guess that Gay wrote it when he was smarting under Walpole's displeasure and angry over the prohibition of *Polly* in 1729. The story comes from Cervantes.[22] If Faulkner's statement is true, that Swift sent Gay two acts of a play with a similar title, parts of *The Rehearsal at Goatham* may be by Swift. It is by all odds the least important of the posthumous plays.

The second series of *The Fables* appeared in 1738, and properly took a place beside the first lot in all future editions of that work. There was little else to come, except for the important poem *Mr. Pope's Welcome from Greece*, which appeared finally in *Additions to the Works of Alexander Pope Esq.* (1776), and the translations from Ariosto, which were not printed until recently, in 1910. The absence of scraps—there are exceedingly few of them—suggests that Swift's advice about burning insignificant trial sheets was probably taken. Most writers on Gay have taken seriously Henry Lee's little volume called *Gay's Chair*, published in 1820, with a memoir by the

[19] Swift, *Letters*, V, 58.

[20] Genest, *Some Account of the English Stage from the Restoration in 1660 to 1830*, III, 428-429; V, 310.

[21] "Register of Books," *Gentleman's Magazine*, XIII, 280, May, 1743: "23. The distress'd wife, a Comedy. By the late Mr. *Gay*. pr. 1s. 6d. *Astley*." *Biographia Dramatica*, II, 167-168.

[22] Nicoll, *A History of Early Eighteenth Century Drama 1700-1750*, p. 214.

Reverend Joseph Baller and a number of supposed juveniles, until Mr. Faber in his recent edition of Gay's *Poems* took the trouble to expose the volume as a literary fraud. Mr. Faber explains with care the sample of Gay's handwriting that Henry Lee offers and finds it spurious. His tests of the versification are equally conclusive. The secret drawer in Gay's chair was of the kind that any child would discover. Probably there were papers in it when Lee first looked the chair over, but in any case there is nothing to prove that the papers which Richard Crook, the cabinetmaker, took from the chair and handed over to the owner are the ones which contained these verses. The chair itself has a reasonably good pedigree. A certain Mr. E. Edwards wrote to the *Gentleman's Magazine* (October, 1819) a letter describing the chair and its history, and noting the contents. Then thirty years later in an article in *The Illustrated London News* T. Hogg Baller, a grandson of the Reverend Joseph Baller, made the following statement about it: "The chair was most certainly Gay's; I have heard both my grandfather and my great aunt often mention it; my grandfather used frequently to say in a familiar manner 'My Uncle Gay's chair.'"[23] It is a bulky piece of furniture and no one would imagine that Gay carried it about very much with him. It probably stood in his Whitehall apartments when Swift was his guest, as the latter liked it well enough to have one made for himself on the same odd pattern. It may have been taken to Amesbury and then at his death to Barnstaple, where after many wanderings it rests finally in the Gay Museum in the old Grammar School.[24]

The manuscript *Life of Gay* by his nephew, the Reverend Joseph Baller, is presumably a genuine document. It turned up at Sotheby's in 1890 along with other Gay items from F. A.

[23] "Curiosities of Brackley Hall," *Illustrated London News*, XV, 284 (Oct. 27, 1849).

[24] The sale of George Godwin's collection of chairs is advertised in the *Times* and *Pall Mall Gazette* for April 20, 1888, and in the *Connoisseur Magazine* for April, 1912 (XXXII, 279-281). The chair passed more recently into the hands of S. Harper of Barnstaple, who paid £70 for it and bequeathed it to the Gay Museum in the Grammar School. For the reference to Swift's chair, see Swift, *Prose Works*, ed. Temple Scott, XII, 73.

Marshall's library. At the time a copy of *Gay's Chair* also was sold, with which had been bound "Gay's original MSS of *The Maids' Petition* and *An Answer to a Predestinarian,* the latter unpublished, also Jonathan Gay's commission and the MS. of Baller's *Memoir.*" None of these is in the poet's autograph, according to Aitken,[25] who finds only the commission and the Baller *Memoir* genuine. The "J. Gay" signature, which appears so oddly below the facsimile of the first four lines of *The Ladies' Petition* in Henry Lee's volume, is not in the manuscript at all. The *Memoir* found its way to America and finally along with the commission reposes in the Ernest Gay collections at Harvard. It is endorsed as follows: "The oldest son of the eldest of these sisters has drawn up these memoirs both from his own knowledge and from what he has heard from his mother.—Barnstaple, July the 2nd. 1776." Another hand has written: "The Life of John Gay written by the Revd. Joseph Baller. 1819."

The poems in *Gay's Chair,* though obviously the work of a clever versemaker and certainly misleading enough with their jaunty Hudibrastics, their smooth narrative, their pretty fabling manner and appropriate local references, are no more Gay's than many other verses written in imitation of that popular writer, from Francis Chute's *Petticoat* down to late pieces such as *An Elegiac Epistle to a Friend,* the latter first published in the *Scots Magazine* (November, 1773). Mr. Faber includes *An Elegiac Epistle* in the Oxford *Gay,* but gives no adequate reason. In my judgment it is merely one of the innumerable imitations of Gray's *Elegy.* The famous *Elegy* itself is of course the product of elaborate interbreeding, though once arrived it is most decidedly an original. If we suppose that *An Elegiac Epistle* was actually written by Gay years before 1751, Gray's claim to priority in that kind evaporates. The measure, the diction, the phrases, the mood, the images, all are Gray's, not Gay's, so much so that one fancies an unfortunate mistake in the type-setting must have occurred in the title page, "Written by Mr. *Gay,* when he laboured under a Dejection of Spirits," and left

[25] G. A. Aitken, "Gay's Chair," *Academy,* XLVII, 426-427 (May 18, 1895).

the imitator gasping that anyone should so far mistake his humble efforts. Certainly the critic who reviewed the new edition of the *English Poets* with Johnson's prefaces for the *Gentleman's Magazine* in December, 1779, was not misled. He was willing to allow from internal proofs that *Duke upon Duke*[26] was Gay's, but about other fresh *Gay* inclusions he is more severe.

There may be cases where, from erroneous judgment, the anonymous works of one writer may, from familiarity of style, be given to another. Even this cannot be justified. But the mistake is venial, compared to what has happened to *Gay; in whose name* a number of poems have within these few years been written, under the following titles:

1. "An Elegiac Epistle to a Friend; written when Mr. Gay laboured under a dejection of spirits." This poem has certainly great merit; and had it been published as an imitation, the writer of it would have deserved and received applause. . . .

This old trick the same magazine had condemned years before in the very month of Gay's death. Among the tricks of booksellers even then the best was to mislead the public by the fraudulent use of famous names, "Joseph for John Gay; which last Article has put Pounds into C[url]l's Pocket by getting off some of his worst Poems." Curll's favorite trick was using a false title page.

> *C*[*u*]*rl* is a perfect Master of his Art,
> By this he puts off Books not worth a F—t.
> But shou'd this fail, this Man of mighty Fame
> Will tell you to prefix some noted Name:
> Poems by *Pope*, and Books by *Joseph Gay*,
> Are what he sells as genuine ev'ry Day;
> Which, though as bad as ever M[it]ch[el]l wrote,
> Stamp'd with these Names, go off as Books of Note.[27]

[26] Cf. *Duke upon Duke, an Excellent New Play-house Ballad.* Set to Musick by Mr. Holdecombe (1723). This ballad on the quarrel between Lord Nicholas Lechmere and Sir John Guise is usually attributed to Swift on the basis of a penciled note on one of the copies in the British Museum. 1720 was probably the date of the first printing.

[27] *The Art of Scribling, Address'd to All the Scribblers of the Age* (1733), p. 19.

No one needs to be reminded how well these professional mysteries were understood and practiced by both writers and publishers in the last half of the eighteenth century, so that the problem of authorship in the case of some poems attributed at various times to Gay is virtually insoluble now. That sort of discussion must be sharply limited here.

IV

On Gay's reputation throughout the eighteenth century some few notes may be in order. As during life his name was coupled with those of Pope and Swift, so later he was hailed as a member of the great Augustan circle. The two periods of most lively interest, it seems to me, were the decade of his death and that of the seventies. The first saw productions of two posthumous plays, and witnessed revivals of *The Beggar's Opera*, a musical performance of *The Espousal*,[28] recurrent editions of *Poems on Several Occasions*, *The Fables*, *Trivia*, *The Shepherd's Week*, and *The What d'ye Call It*. Hosts of minor poets paid their respects, often overgenerous in their estimates. To many of these men, the great age of poetry seemed to have passed with the death of Gay. Only Pope and Swift remained to remind them of what once had been.

> Few now remain to say who sung before,
> Parnel is dead—and Addison no more!
> The few remaining time will sweep away,
> And Pope and Swift must shortly follow Gay;
> These only left of all the tuneful quire,
> Garth, Steel, Rowe, Congreve, Wycherley, and Prior;
> These only left, the world's great loss declare,
> And serve to shew us what those wonders were.[29]

Bramston, Mallet, Stephen Duck, William Guthrie, all pay their respects to Gay's power as a poet and playwright, and to his virtues as a man. The last named wrote a fanciful essay for the *Gentleman's Magazine* (January, 1739) called "The Apotheosis of Milton," in which Gay appears. Guthrie imagines a sightseeing tour through heaven.

[28] See British Museum *Tracts*, 1890 [e. 5 (127)].

[29] The Reverend James De-la-Cour, *A Prospect of Poetry* (5th ed., 1770), p. 13.

A little after I observed a Man of a sweet engaging Deportment, his Eye was piercing, and a Smile sat upon his Brow, which discover'd what I had almost call'd a severe Good-nature. It was, however, a Good-nature, whose Expression seem'd rather to pity than upbraid; and, at the same time, even the Pity convey'd a Reproach. His habits were of the richest Stuff, but those about him which were most conceal'd were most rich, and my Conductor told me that I could not have a just Notion of their Beauty unless I was nearer his Person. He then inform'd me, that I saw Mr. *Gay;* a Man, added he, whose Virtues recommended his Qualities, and who is an Instance, that the best Ingredient that can enter the Character of a good Writer, is that of being an honest Man.

This adjective *honest* is applied to him more frequently than any other. Just as the contemporaries of Shakespeare always spoke of him as gentle Shakespeare, so men of Gay's time were continually recalling honest John Gay, the honest speech of Gay, the inflexible honesty of Gay.

Of his love for fine clothes and general fastidiousness, those who did not like him sometimes made capital.

> Fair as fair Rosamund in hand, and face;
> By looking-glass's sweetly study'd grace
> From foot to forehead fashion'd à-la-mode,
> With coupée step, and softly simper shrewd;
> Riddle-my-rée! Alack-a-day, who's this?
> Why, master Gay; or else I hit a miss.[30]

The love of finery was an essential part of Gay's nature, as we have already noticed, and not an unpleasant quality either.

Generally, the comments that were made soon after his death concerned his own personal character rather than the quality of his verse. As a writer he is *lepidissimus, cultus et elegans,* but as a man, he is *lenissimi animi, ingenui vultus, et vitae integerrimae.*[31] One finds hardly a hostile voice in this chorus of praise. It is amusing to note, however, that Gay's frivolous

[30] [G. Pilgrim Plowden,] *Farrago* (1733), p. 121.

[31] His friend Maurice Johnson, of the Gentlemen's Society at Spalding, called him "*poeta lepidissimus.*" The other phrases appear in a complimentary footnote in William King's *Sermo Pedestris* (1739), p. 7. This William King was Principal of St. Mary Hall, Oxford.

JOHN GAY

From a lithograph of Hogarth's sketch in the British Museum

treatment of the Quakers gets its due reward in the notice of the poet's death in the Quaker journal, *The Friendly Writer, and Register of Truth.*

> *John Gay*, who had formerly put forth a great Heap of idle Songs, and vain Words, which gave great Delight unto the Multitude, died of a raging inflammatory Fever, at the House of a Noble. There were many Lamentations shewn on this Occasion, and his Name mainly cried up by those that love Rhiming, or the Jingling of Words, and some Hints aimed at the Superiors, for not regarding the Merit of so valuable a Person: And some talk of Monuments, and I know not what all, intended to be made of Stone, and set up to his Name . . .
>
> The vain *Opera of Beggars* hath been again revived by the Men called Players, at the New Temple of Satan in *Covent-Garden;* whither Men and Women run every Night, in great Numbers, to behold a young Damsel, named *Norsa*, who singeth many idle vain Songs to delight the Ears of the Wicked.[32]

Between the thirties and the seventies Gay's reputation stood firm among the great names of the early century. There is occasional evidence of the usual feeling of a modernity superior to the age immediately preceding.

> Talk not of Pope, of Addison, or Gay,
> Of Dryden, Congreve, Wycherly or Grey;
> Men of contracted principles and worth,
> Quite other beings from our present growth.[33]

The Augustans yield to Churchill, Lloyd, Gray, and Mason, and of course Gay suffers with the rest. Moreover, there is a tendency to deprecate what the serious-minded felt to be the loose morals of some of the older poets and dramatists.

> Perish the name, and be the works no more
> Lov'd or remember'd on the British shore,
> Of Congreve, Otway, Whicherly and Gay,
> And all who lead our rising youth astray,
> From virtuous paths by ornamenting lies.[34]

[32] Dec., 1732, pp. 12, 25.
[33] [Thomas Vaughan,] *The Retort* (1761).
[34] *Satire, a Poem* (1764), p. 17.

It is to be noticed that even the grave moralists place Gay in distinctly "good" society.

With the passing of time comes no change in the estimate of Gay's character but a growing discrimination in the judgments passed on his verse. Warton, busy as early as 1754 in questioning the classic solidity of Pope's reputation, found space to suggest some doubts about the high quality of Gay's verse also.

> The sweetness and simplicity of Gay's temper and manners, much endeared him to all his acquaintance, and made them always speak of him with particular fondness and attachment. He wrote with neatness, and terseness, aequali quâdam mediocritate, but certainly without any elevation; frequently without any spirit.[35]

People who for one reason or another were definitely prejudiced against Gay, like Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Horace Walpole, found reasons easily enough to justify their dislike, or dogmatically asserted without troubling about reasons. Lady Mary spoke of Gay as a good-natured man and a little poet, and scorns the Duchess of Queensberry for "mistaking Johnny Gay for a wit." Horace Walpole once paid Gay the greatest of compliments, that of imitation, though he refused to acknowledge it. He had attempted the art of writing fables, and *The Funeral of the Lioness* (1751) is very much in Gay's manner, not, as he would have it believed, in La Fontaine's.

> Each shaggy baron and his dame
> From distant wood and highland came;
> And much they gossip of the queen,
> Of tickets, places, bombazeen,
> And much they press and crowd to show
> At once their dignity and woe.[36]

Imitations flowed freely from less distinguished pens, examples of which I must refrain from giving, imitations of *Trivia*, of *The Fables*, of *The Beggar's Opera*, of the Tales. Almost every anthology that appeared had selections from Gay's verse. Various editions of the individual works were

[35] Joseph Warton, *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope*, II, 244.
[36] I owe this suggestion to Dorothy Stuart, *Horace Walpole* (1927), p. 122.

printed. For editions of the collected *Works* the 1770's were especially remarkable. There were at least ten editions of the *Poems* or the *Plays* or both during that decade. *The Distress'd Wife* was produced in 1771, *Polly* for the first time in 1777, *The Beggar's Opera* again and again in London, and in places so far flung as Edinburgh and Hamburg. This decade saw the revival of the controversy over the moral influence of the opera, owing to Mr. Justice Fielding's attempts at prohibition in 1773, and, as a concession to the demands of morality, the alteration of the play to include the hulks scene and the conversion of Macheath. Mr. Schultz quotes from *St. James's Chronicle* (March 13, 1779): "Mr. Sheridan is a popular writer; but in the Scales of Criticism, if Popularity were a Circumstance of Weight, Gay would rival Milton, and Whitefield be preferred to Xenophon."[37]

This decade of Gay's greatest popularity was the time, as it happened, when Gay's Duchess died.

> She lov'd the Poet's pleasing lay,
> Was gentle to the gentle Gay.[38]

How pleased she would have been with Ritson's praise a few years later, perhaps the most extravagant estimate ever made of Gay's genius!

> Gay, the accomplished, the inimitable Gay, is the ornament of the ensuing reign. The infinite obligations which the lovers of song are under to this admirable writer can never be sufficiently expressed. Lively, humorous, witty, elegant, tender and pathetic; happy and successful in whatever the universality of his genius prompted him to undertake; his spirit, his sentiment, his language are pure nature; and, while a love of poetry and song, or a particle of taste remains among us, will certainly be remembered, and must always please.[39]

A writer in *The Bystander* (1790) calls Gay a most charming, careless, natural poet, admires particularly his pastorals, his fables, his *Trivia*, and resents Dr. Johnson's attempt to confine

[37] W. E. Schultz, *Gay's Beggar's Opera*, p. 78.

[38] Ewan Clark, "An elegiac Pastoral On the Death of the Right Honourable the Duchess of Queensberry," *Miscellaneous Poems* (Whitehaven, 1779), pp. 138-140.

[39] Joseph Ritson, *Select Collections of English Songs* (1783), I, lxiv.

him to the lower order of poets. Dr. Johnson had, however, said one excellent thing about Gay: "He had not in any great degree the *mens divinior*, the dignity of genius." Gay was bound to offend against several of Johnson's pet prejudices. The great dictator's dislike of pastoral verse precluded appreciation of *The Shepherd's Week;* he did not even mention it. His worship of the genres made him captious about *The Fables*, and his dislike of mythological machinery gave a tone of irritation to his praise of *Trivia*, which he allowed to be "spritely, various, and pleasant." He praised Gay most highly for his invention of ballad opera, but had not one word of any kind about Gay's power in lyric verse. Johnson's verdict was emphatically not the verdict of the century. Ritson's and that of the anonymous writer in *The Bystander* are much closer to it.

Gay's popularity continued through the early nineteenth century, as anyone may discover who cares to turn over the pages of that delightful book *Wine and Walnuts; or After Dinner Chit-Chat* (1823), by Ephraim Hardcastle, Citizen and Dry-Salter. William Henry Pyne, the author of this, had a real appreciation for Gay's quality. As the century wore on, most people confined their attention almost exclusively to two Gay items: *The Beggar's Opera* and *The Fables*. The first continued popular, and the second almost acquired sanctity by its juxtaposition with the Bible on all Victorian parlor tables. One anecdote reflecting the undiminished lustre of *The Beggar's Opera* in the mid-century deserves repetition. It comes from *The Fraserian Papers of the late William Maginn LL. D.* (1857). On pages 110-111 of this volume there are specimens of a translation into Latin of songs (1, 2, 9, and 14) of *The Beggar's Opera* with the following explanatory note:

> Some years ago it was proposed, at a very pleasant party near the banks of the Thames—it is not necessary to say who composed it, but those who can decipher what is meant by the initials T[heodore] E[dward] H[ook], J[ames] S[mith], J[ohn] W[ilson] C[roker], will allow that it comprised some of the most witty and agreeable people in London—to write a variorum commentary, in the manner of Malone's "Shakespeare," on the "Beggar's Opera." One critic

was to perform the part of Warburton, another of Johnson, a third of Farmer, and so on. Part of the jest was to consist in proving that Gay imitated the ancient classics very palpably;—something of the kind is often done by the Shakespearian commentators, (see note on "the sea of troubles," in Hamlet, and a thousand other places;) and as it would be rather difficult to *find* Augustan authorities for the songs of the "Beggar's Opera," I was engaged to *make* them. The four following scraps of doggrel Latin were part of these *originals*. Nothing further was done towards completing the commentary.

Nothing further perhaps than to laugh at Dr. Maginn for taking the suggestion seriously!

Quite recently, largely because of Nigel Playfair's successful revival of *The Beggar's Opera* at Hammersmith, the general public has once again become aware of the fact that Gay wrote something else besides the famous opera and the now somewhat dusty fables. Readers have gone back to Austin Dobson's appreciative study of Gay, and less frequently to Underhill's *Memoir* and sought to know something about the man as well as his work. They have welcomed beautiful reprints of various plays and poems, and overlooking the romantic haze about some hills that once seemed mountains, they are willing now and finally to recognize John Gay as an important figure in the history of English literature.

V

As a poet Gay seems to us in this late day to have followed the conventional patterns of his own time; he created several of them, and occasionally even a greater artist like Pope followed his lead. He never indulged the larger epical ambitions of the poet, nor undertook any task monumental to perpetuate his fame. Perhaps the spectre of Sir Richard Blackmore was too much for him, or more likely—since Milton had come and gone—his modesty or his frivolity turned him rather to burlesque. There was gaiety in his nature as in his name, and, I think, an incapacity for the sustained effort necessary for the larger projects. His genius was for minute description in verse and for lighthearted song. The strain of melancholy is only occasional, and the pathos is usually mocking. Though one

notices a growing scorn for the set design in verse and the merely imitative, Gay usually did his best writing when some model was firmly fixed in his mind. He could vary the scrolls and surprise with new motives, but he needed the support of a preconceived "scheme," to use his own word for his poetic practice. The genres of poetry, as such, seemed unimportant to him; he was constantly irreverent in his treatment of them, and yet he owed many of his best conceptions to them, stale as many of them were by the beginning of the eighteenth century, and his refurbishing of their faded glories is to some extent the measure of his genius. We love him most of all, however, for his Hogarthian exactitudes, and we love him for his songs.

On both these points I have commented frequently, and they perhaps need no special emphasis in this final summary. Of his power as a writer of songs let me add a few more words. His genius is uneven in many genres, but he is steadily and highly superior in song. Clarity and delicacy of phrase are always at his command. The outlines are never flaccid and never stiff. His songs will bear comparison with the best of Restoration verses in that kind, and that is a high compliment. In the love songs there is often an added tenderness which surprises, since we usually think of Gay as an understanding friend of women rather than as the practicing lover. They are not merely wistful, as one might expect, but full-bodied,—rough, sweet generous, intense, as the mood is on him. Like Shakespeare, like Dryden, like Burns (for indeed he gave hints to Burns), but usually like no one but himself, he probes the depths and skims the surfaces, adapting his measure to the feeling expressed and conscious always of the melody that must support the words and of the form which enshrines the passion and without which love may be articulated perhaps but not expressed. Wine and women are the themes, with a hint of the plaintive *carpe diem* motive occasionally. Raucous he can be when he wants to, obscene on occasion also. The man is human and knows what men know. He is the voice of beast and spirit if you like, of the fleshly and of the ideal, but he refuses to recognize any dichotomy. Beauty gives an ethereal quality to the instinct that produces beauty; we can ride the crest of the

wave or sink in the depths, but never is there need to languish in any prison house of the Puritan. Gay was greater than his age in this power of song. His ear could catch and hold a melody; he could build his airy framework of words to fit his melody and to express his sense of abounding life.

As a writer of letters Gay has scarcely been discovered, let alone praised. He has all the qualities that we admire and indeed demand in social intercourse of that kind today, but rarely look for in the professional letter-writers of an earlier time. He is always and absolutely without pose. He writes as he would talk. He can be, and often is, playful or facetious, and he can be highly serious, but he is rarely dull. He is gossipy, but never informative. He is conscious, I suppose, always of the person on the other end of the line, and adapts his tone to suit his correspondent. He is willing to forget himself and can; most of us find that process very difficult.

In drama he had a larger share of bad luck than he deserved. One gets the impression of a special kind of dramatic power in him obviously, but smothered by the lack of the sympathetic support, which that age was incapable of giving him, and without which he was unable to work. His wit was the kind that failed to hit the fancies of Augustan audiences. They struggled to laugh at *The What d'ye Call It,* made a party issue of *Three Hours after Marriage,* were properly edified when Gay gave them what they wanted in *The Captives,* and almost by accident dissolved into applause and laughter before *The Beggar's Opera.* They did not deserve the amusement he might have given them with proper encouragement. Even laughter, it seems, depends on fashion, and in the cycles of wit Gay appeared at just the wrong time. His genius was for farcical absurdity, and men wanted mawkish sentimentality or spectacle or comedy of manners. A little later Goldsmith and Sheridan were strong enough to command attention—by that time people had perhaps a surfeit of false delicacies—but Gay yielded before the tide, as all but the greatest must do. His originality was his damnation.

These last paragraphs about his artistic achievement and limitations will suggest to some extent the right attitude towards

Gay as a man. He was a serious artist, though not a great one, and a serious artist is inevitably a man of character. The marks of creative effort cut deep, and the attempt at self-expression in art moulds the self so expressed to a form that is akin to beauty. Gay started life as he started in his art with a deep respect for the accepted; Puritan principles and aristocratic prejudices he had inherited, and to the end of his life he could moralize with as much ease and as little meaning as, let us say, Bolingbroke. But the ways of the world taught him that conformity with the accepted was of minor importance in the realm of morals compared with kindliness that was unwilling to wound even an enemy, modesty that was careless even of reputation, and honesty that scorned pretense.

Gay was not really ambitious. Ambition and its usual accompaniment, the trick of self-advertisement, might have made him the equal of Pope, at least in the estimate of his own generation. He lacked, I suppose, energy. Whether energy can be cultivated, or depends on gland secretions is perhaps beside the point here, but we should realize that Gay for many years fought a losing battle with disease and not judge him too harshly. Sick or well he wanted to live the full life and felt that the full life meant more than artistic achievement, important as he knew that to be. Love is of the valley, and friends are there; on the mountaintops one stands alone. The common life of men interested Gay. He was amused by its absurdities, and sometimes saddened by its revelations. He was never outraged by its perversities. He was willing to accept life as he found it, to call it jest or earnest as the mood was upon him. Never did he seek to explain the inexplicable, or, it appears, to bow before the mystery of things. A fly on the cathedral dome, he refused to speculate on the principles of architecture.

We can leave him then as typical of the best his age could show, strong in his friendships, keen in his wit but superficial, perhaps rather too adjustable to the conditions of his immediate neighborhood. All loved him, none feared him, laughter and tears followed him.

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